

# THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR LORD



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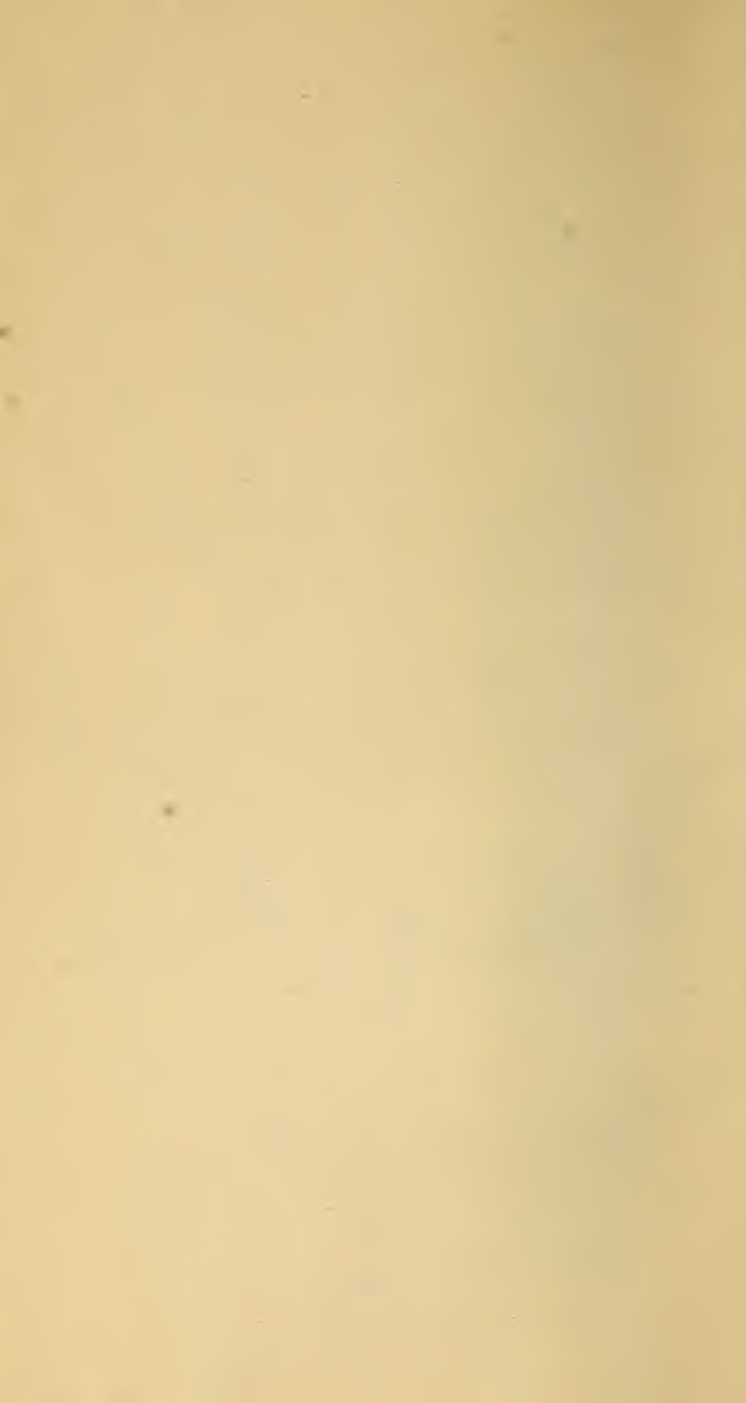
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PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS  
ON THE  
SUFFERINGS OF OUR LORD;  
OR,  
LESSONS OF THE PASSION.

*César Guillaumont*  
FROM THE FRENCH OF CARDINAL DE LA LUZERNE,

BY

*Joseph*  
VERY REV. S. BYRNE, O.P.

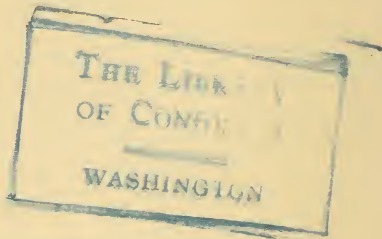
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## APPROBATIONS.

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Nos infrascripti Revisores Ordinis Prædicatorum pro scriptis excudendis, fidem facimus quod attente prælecto opusculo, "Practical Reflections on the Sufferings of our Lord; or, Lessons of the Passion," Anglice converso ex operibus Eminentissimi Cardinalis De la Luzerne, ipsum typis mandari permittimus.

In quorum fidem, his propria manu subscripsimus.

Datum Somerset, O., in Conventu S. Joseph,  
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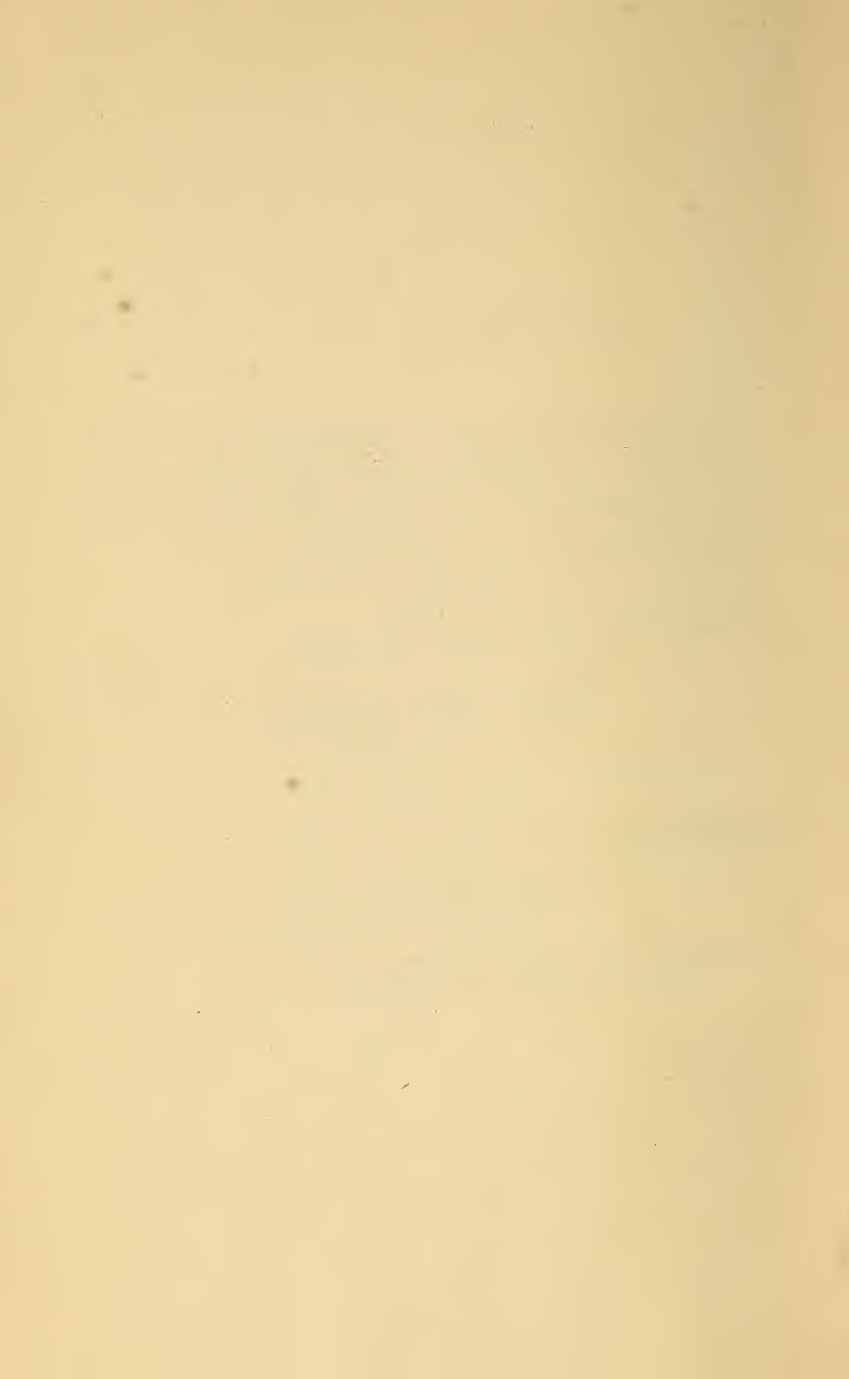
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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

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THOUGH much has been written on the Sacred Passion of our Divine Redeemer, the meditations here offered are not a superfluous addition to our ascetic literature, but rather an important aid to other treatises on this subject.

They are particularly recommended because of their practical character. To those readers who are acquainted with the "Explications des Evangiles" of Cardinal De la Luzerne his name will be a sufficient recommendation. He was one of the most solid and practical thinkers of modern times.

It is hoped, therefore, that these meditations will afford assistance to devout souls who are anxious not only to study the Passion of our Blessed Lord, but also to give in their own lives some real, practical expression to the lessons which His Passion teaches.

ST. JOSEPH'S CONVENT, PERRY Co., OHIO,

FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION, January 1, 1885.



I.

*JESUS SUFFERED TO REDEEM US.*





PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS

ON THE

SUFFERINGS OF OUR LORD.

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I.

JESUS SUFFERED TO REDEEM US.

“We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the gentiles foolishness; but to them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Cor. i. 23, 24.)

IN the religious and Christian sense we have come to the most important, the most precious season of the year. Of these days, dedicated to the commemoration of the sufferings and death of our Blessed Redeemer, it may well be said: “This is the acceptable time; this is the day of salvation.” It is the time foretold by Isaiah the prophet and mentioned by the Apostle, in which the Lord has chosen to hear us, to grant us the abundance of His favors,\* and to accomplish the

\* Isaiah xlix. 8; 2 Cor. vi. 2.

work of our redemption. By the sight of His blood shed for us He excites us to apply its fruits to our souls. If we desire to commemorate the sorrowful mysteries of our Lord we must prepare ourselves for the work by the fasts prescribed for this time, by hearing the word of God more frequently, and by greater assiduity in prayer. Can it be possible that we would present ourselves at the holy offices in which the sufferings of our Lord are so vividly portrayed, only through custom or human respect? that we would assist at them either with complete indifference, or at most with a passing sensibility excited by the recital of this tragic history? that we would be less moved than the Jews themselves, who, while returning from Calvary, struck their breasts with real sorrow? If we had lived in the time and place honored by the presence of Jesus Christ; if we had witnessed His humiliations and sorrows, with what sentiments would we not have been moved! Thither let us go in thought. Let us follow our Divine Master from one anguish to another; from the Garden of Olives to Calvary's mount; and let us consider each of His steps, marked as it is by a special torment or opprobrium. Then, casting our eyes upon ourselves, let us reflect

that it was for us He left His throne of glory to undergo so many humiliations. To procure our happiness, He delivered Himself to frightful tortures. To give us life, He suffered a most cruel and disgraceful death. In realizing, on the one side, these manifold benefits, and on the other our cold response, how can we bear the sight of our hardness and ingratitude?

But we have now not merely to excite ourselves to a barren grief, to a short-lived penance. We are called not only to mourn the death of our Saviour, but to make the thought of it a part of our lives; to imprint upon our minds and hearts deeply and irrevocably the sublime truths, the grand instructions, the wonderful mysteries herein presented to us. This is the return, this the acknowledgment that our Lord requires of us in His Passion. "Attend and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow"\* is the command we read in Jeremias. "Look," says St. Paul, "on Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith, who, having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame. . . . Think diligently upon Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself, that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds."†

\* Lamentations i. 12.

† Heb. xii. 2, 3.

It was meditation on the Passion of our Lord that enabled the greatest saints to acquire heroic virtue ; that taught the martyrs patience, gave them courage, and made them embrace death in all its hideous forms. The constant thought of His sufferings sustained the solitaries under their astonishing mortifications. At the foot of the cross the most renowned and effective preachers and defenders of the faith sought the sublime instructions which they delivered to their fellow-men. Let us endeavor, even at a distance, to walk in their footsteps, and we also shall participate in the graces and sanctity conferred upon them. Let us follow all the circumstances of the Passion of our Lord as they present themselves to our minds, to fill them with good thoughts ; and to our hearts, to penetrate them with grateful love.

Entering upon the consideration of this great mystery, the thought which first arrests us is one of astonishment. That God should be so humbled, suffer so much, and die on a cross confounds and casts down human reason. It can scarcely recognize in Jesus Christ its God, who manifested Himself in glory on Thabor, who was followed in His career of preaching by immense crowds, who hung suspended even for



several days upon His every word. Reason has seen Him commanding nature, stilling the tempest, walking on the waters, driving the demon back to his own place, giving health to the sick and life to the dead. But when it considers Him delivered over to a barbarous multitude, whose sport He becomes, and who delight in torturing Him, then it will understand the word of the Apostle, "that to the Jew He was a stumbling-block; to the heathen He was foolishness itself." \* But listen to the same Apostle in the same place when he says that to "these very Jews and gentiles believing in Him, He was the power of God and the wisdom of God."

The mission of Christ on earth had two objects: to rescue man from the slavery in which Satan held him chained, and to save him from the corruption into which sin had plunged him. Therefore He came to save us and to instruct us; to satisfy His Father's justice, and to show us how to merit His mercy. His whole life was employed in this twofold ministry; but in His Passion it was perfectly realized, absolutely consummated. It is in His Passion we are fully enabled to recognize in Him our Redeemer and our

\* 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

Teacher as well. From the beginning, therefore, let us contemplate Him in this double office.

It was necessary for Christ to suffer.\* Thus He Himself teaches us. The nature of this necessity is beyond our knowledge. What we do know with certainty is that the injury offered to Him by sin had to be fully repaired. He required a complete satisfaction, proportioned to the offence. This full reparation and satisfaction we see accomplished in the Passion and death of His Divine Son. Whether we consider the nature of the sin to be atoned for, or the extent of the injury to be repaired, we find that the sacrifice of the God-Man abundantly satisfies the Divine Majesty for all. Jesus Christ is man, and He pays the debt of man; He is also God, and He pays it in a manner and to an extent worthy of God.

The offence of the first man which Christ came to repair consisted principally in three things: first, in the pride which aimed at making man equal to God; secondly, in the criminal sensuality which would not abstain from the forbidden fruit; thirdly, in disobeying a formal and express command of God. The Redeemer

\* Luke xxiv. 46.

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of the human race expiates this triple sin of our first father, and applies to each vice its own remedy. To pride He applies unheard-of humiliations; to sensuality, sufferings such as no other has endured; to disobedience, complete submission of His will to that of His Father. In the midst of His executioners He seems to say to us: "Forgetting that thou art only a creature, thou hast had the extravagant folly to make thyself equal to thy Creator; and I, God as I am, descend to the state of the last of men, the sport and shame even of the vilest. Abandoned to thy brutal appetite, thou hast given to thy senses a forbidden pleasure; and I, leaving the enjoyment of infinite beatitude, have come to deliver Myself to the most cruel tortures. Thou hast dared rebel against thy God and despise His commandments; and I, absolute Master of all that exists, submit Myself to the yoke of a most absolute obedience, becoming subject not only to God but to men also—and these the most unjust, criminal, and barbarous. Thus, in every part of My most painful sacrifice, I repair and expiate all the vices with which thou art infected."

It was doing much for man to apply a divine remedy to his miseries; but there remained

something more difficult of accomplishment, and that was to satisfy the divine justice. To cure man God must be appeased. Man had need of a restorer ; God required a victim. And where will He find one worthy of His outraged majesty ? What satisfaction can equal the offence ? All the sacrifices offered to God from the time of Abel to that of Christ could only suspend but could not avert the divine anger. Victims of all times, of all nations, of all kinds might be offered to disarm the anger of God ; but what proportion is there between all created things, which are finite, and God, who is infinite ? Is it, then, impossible for God to obtain the satisfaction due to Him ? Behold a Victim of a new order comes to receive the strokes of divine wrath. The Heavenly Father had waited four thousand years ; He had inspired the patriarchs with desires of this Victim ; He had announced His coming by numberless figures, and had foretold it by a long line of prophetic oracles. At length Christ appears, and thus addresses His Father : “ Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not, but a body Thou hast fitted to Me. Holo-causts for sin did not please Thee. Then said I, behold I come. In the head of the book it is written of Me that I should do Thy will, O

God.” \* What was promised at His birth was accomplished by His death. His love for men, His submission to His Father’s will, brought to Jerusalem a Victim worthy of Him to whom it was offered. The vengeance taken by the great God upon sin was equal to the outrage offered Him by sin. The offence was infinite ; the reparation must be so too ; and if it is a God that must be satisfied, it is a God that satisfies. Thus are all interests reconciled ; all duties fulfilled ; all debts remitted ; all rights preserved. Man obtains all that he could desire ; God receives all that He wished to exact.

We are accustomed to consider Jesus Christ as the Saint of saints, the very principle of sanctity, Sanctity itself. It would be a criminal error to suppose anything else. But in His Passion He ceases to appear so. The sanctity which is an essential part of Himself He now hides under the dark veil of our sins. God throws upon Him the sins of the whole world ; † He is charged with them, and for the time He becomes the universal, the most public sinner. Thus St. Paul, inspired by the Holy Ghost, fears not to say that “ He who knew no sin, for us He hath made sin.” ‡ All the sins of the human race are

\* Heb. x. 5, 6, 7.

† Isaias liii. 6.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 21.



laid upon Him, and form around Him a black cloud which obscures and eclipses the bright rays of His sanctity. In this state He presents Himself to God ; and instead of being any longer the cherished Son of the Eternal Father, the object of all His delight, He now becomes an object of malediction.\* God conceives for Him all the horror with which He had ever regarded sin. He became the object of eternal vengeance and wrath. No longer, then, may we wonder at His humiliations and sufferings. As Tertulian says, He is the Man of sorrows only because He bears our sins. In this view of the case there is no punishment to which He is not subject. He is liable not only to the penalty of one sinner but of all sinners, because He takes the place of all. And all classes conspire against Him—Jews, Gentiles, priests, laymen, nobles and plebeians, judges and soldiers. In the whole multitude that surrounds Him He has not one defender, not one intercessor, not one that has pity on Him. He is charged with the universal revolt against the Divine Majesty ; and in the punishment of it He sees a common consent given to the persecution directed against Him.

\* Gal. iii. 13.

It is God that so ordains it. It is, then, a divine decree that delivers Jesus over to torture and to death. The judges who condemn Him, the soldiers who execute the sentence, only carry out the sentence passed against Him from all eternity. When the high-priest, Caiphas, in the midst of the assembly declared that "one should die that the whole people might be saved," he was the mouthpiece of an oracle which he did not understand.\* He was in this the organ of the supreme will of God, whom he then ignored. St. Peter, a few days after the crucifixion and deicide, declared to the Jews that it was according to the decrees of God that Jesus should be delivered up, and put to death by impious hands.† But remember that, until the arrival of the moment fixed in the decrees of Providence, neither the envy of the priests nor the pride of the doctors could do anything against Him. They respected that decree in spite of themselves. But when the time came they furiously fell upon the Victim that had been abandoned to them. Submissive to the decrees of His Father, our Blessed Saviour delivers Himself to them, and bows respectfully to the unseen hand which strikes Him by the hands of these barba-

\* John xi. 50.

† Acts ii. 23.

rians. His obedience to His Father's will is absolute. He bends under it even to the death of the cross.\*

Yet the Passion of our Lord to be the effect of obedience, must be the result of His own free will. This is the admirable concert between the Father and the Son: the Father ordains only what the Son wills; and the Son wills all that the Father ordains. Long before He had said by the prophet: "He was offered because it was His own will."† And, in the course of His life, He expressly declared that no one could take His life, but that He Himself would lay it down.‡ Ordinary men die because they are constrained to it, death being the penalty of sin in which we were all born and from which we cannot escape. But the Man-God, whom no stain of sin could sully, was not subject to the common law. He died, having the power not to die; and to die there was need to Him of an act of His omnipotence. Excepting Him no man was capable of offering the act of redemption. According to St. Paul, to immolate the Victim who should reconcile God and man there was need of a "high-priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens, who

\* Philipp. ii. 8.

† Isaias liii. 7.

‡ John x. 18.

needeth not daily, as other priests, to offer up sacrifices first for his own sins and then for the people's ; for this He did once, in offering Himself." \* He alone could be the proper victim of the great sacrifice ; He alone was the priest fitted to offer this sacrifice. It was only His blood that could appease the divine wrath, and it was only His hands that were pure enough to offer it. The Jews shed that blood to gratify their fury against Him ; but it was He Himself that offered it for the remission of our sins.

Therefore we should never lose sight of the thought that our sins were the cause of His death. In the very beginning of our meditation on this great mystery let us adhere strictly and humbly to the reflection that we are verily the authors of the deicide. Every torment we see Him suffer should recall to our minds the words of the prophet : "He was wounded for our iniquities ; He was bruised for our sins." † If we had not sinned, God would never have suffered. It was because we were slaves that He came to make us free. In the old law it was required, when a man was found murdered on the highway, and the author of the crime was unknown, that the residents of the neighborhood should

\* Heb. vii. 26, 27.

† Isaiah liii. 5.

be called together and should wash their hands over the victim to signify that they were guiltless of his blood. In looking at the cross upon which our Saviour died, which of us can have the hardihood to say: My hands had no part in the shedding of this blood? This is a thought profoundly sad and humiliating, yet most salutary. Every time that I sin against my Saviour I not only join the army of His enemies, but I also become one of His executioners. I am even more culpable than they; for, His death was not for them what it was for me. They knew Him not. "And if they had known they would never have crucified the Lord of Glory." \* With all this knowledge I yet outrage Him! And knowing Him well, I crucify again the Son of God.† But shall I continue so ungrateful, so unnatural as to renew, while the power remains in me, the Passion of my Redeemer? God grant that this thought may be efficacious in me; that I may be stricken with grief for the sins I have committed and armed with a holy vigilance against committing them in future.

Another thought and we conclude. If it were necessary for the Son of God to be the Victim for the redemption of man, was it also necessary

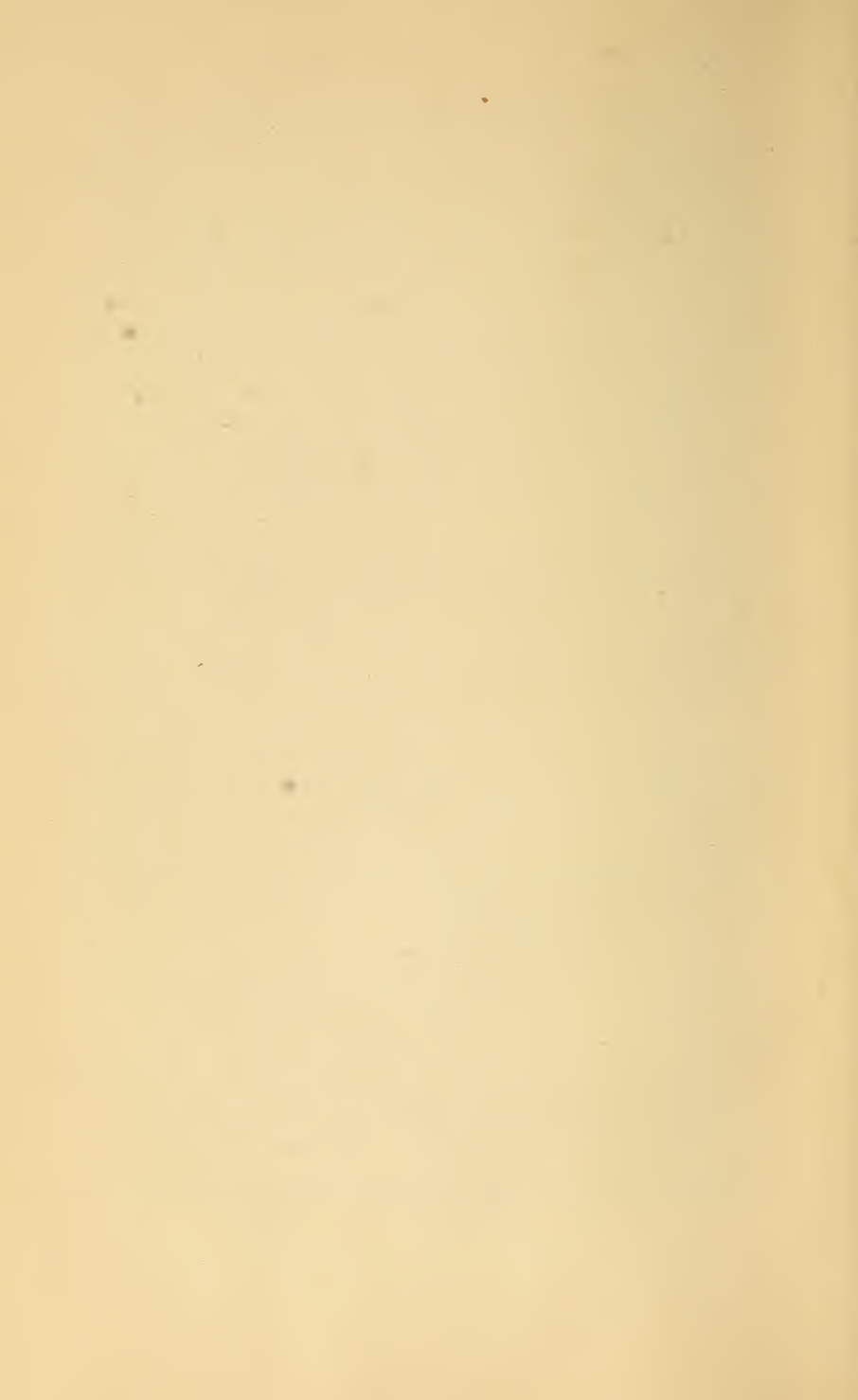
\* 1 Cor. ii. 8.

† Heb. vi.



for Him to deliver Himself up to the shocking pains, opprobrium, and wretchedness of His Passion? One drop of His blood, one tear, one sigh would have been of infinite value in the sight of God, would have been sufficient to have redeemed the universe. But then the designs which His wisdom and goodness had proposed to Him would have been incomplete. That which sufficed for our salvation did not suffice for our instruction. In suffering for us He wished to teach us how to suffer for Him; "because," says St. Peter, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps." \* During His life He continually practised humility, self-denial, mortification, and the love of His enemies. But how strongly are His words upheld by the miracle of His example, especially in His sacred Passion! Never will it be given to any man to follow our Lord in His sublime virtues except at a distance; but He obliges all to meditate upon His divine law, and, as far as human weakness will allow, to conform to the Divine Model. Let us study the lessons He teaches, in order that we may reduce them to practice. These will be the subject of the next meditation.

\* 1 Peter ii. 21.



## II.

*JESUS CHRIST SUFFERED TO INSTRUCT US.*



## II.

### JESUS CHRIST SUFFERED TO INSTRUCT US.

“For I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” (1 Cor. ii. 2.)

FROM the day on which our Saviour descended from the bosom of His Father to dwell with men, His whole life was consecrated to their instruction. All His words were lessons, all His acts examples. But the teaching of the thirty-three years of His life on earth was epitomized in His last hours. The lesson of His death was the abridgment of the lessons of His life. If no other part of His life had been given to us but the time of His Passion, we could have learned in it alone all that it is necessary for us to know. The great Apostle of the Gentiles tells us that he needed no other knowledge. Let us endeavor to penetrate the exhaustless depths of his instructions—not to master them, not fully to develop them; but to take from them a succinct and general idea of the great lessons Jesus Christ gives us.

Do you desire to know God, at least so far as your feeble reason permits? Study the Passion.

Nothing can give you so grand an idea of His infinite being and perfections. You will see how great He is when you reflect that it was necessary to His glory that a Man-God should annihilate himself by embracing the death of the cross. You will perceive how holy He must be when it required the anguish and shame of this Man-God to avenge His insulted majesty ; you will see how terrible must be His justice when it could be appeased only by the blood of His Divine Son. You will learn the extent of His mercy when you behold that Divine Son immolate Himself, even for His very enemies ; you may imagine the depths of His wisdom when you behold Him reconciling His own interests with those of a lost race by so efficacious a means as the sacrifice of the same Man-God. Whatever we may learn from the most eloquent preachers, or even from books inspired by the Holy Ghost Himself, cannot so well explain to us the incomprehensible nature of God as the Passion of our Saviour. In all the religious systems that ever have occupied the minds of men we find nothing that presents to us such sublime and just ideas of God as does this central object of our religion.

The enormity of sin is another object of necessary knowledge to be derived from this consider-



ation. Libertines may laugh when they are told of the hideousness of sin, of the hatred God bears to it ; they may treat us as mere declaimers and charge us with exaggeration. The incredulous affect to be revolted when they hear of the eternal punishments inflicted on sin ; they cannot bear the awful thought ; they say it is not conformable to the goodness of God. Come, both of you, and disabuse yourselves at the foot of the cross. There learn what an evil it must be that can only be expiated by the death of a Man-God. Measure the extent of this evil by that of the reparation, and be convinced of the just proportion between the offence and the eternity of its punishment. The rigor of God's justice towards His own Son, who was but the image of sin in the hour of His trial, will clearly prove to you its terrible vengeance towards sin itself. The cross gives us a just conception of hell ; the more you cling to the cross in holy contemplation the more will you learn to detest and fly from sin, which has necessitated the cross and opened hell.

This thought is followed by one more consoling : it is the price of our souls. Their true value is that set upon them by the Almighty Himself. At what price have we been redeemed ? In the

Passion of Christ let us learn to esteem ourselves at our true value, measuring the importance of our salvation by what it cost the Man-God. Our salvation, so great in His eyes, has often been of small moment in our own. How often have we endangered it? And wherefore? For a false conception of honor, for a frivolous ambition, for a base interest, for some infamous pleasure, for a cruel revenge. Let us correct ourselves in the presence of our suffering God. He seems to say to us from the cross: "Have pity on your souls, as you see Me having pity on them! Compare what your salvation has cost you with what it has cost Me. By the sacrifice of My life I have saved you; and to secure it you only have to sacrifice your passions and sins."

These considerations regarding God, sin, and salvation, are truly essential, though not the only ones we may draw from the mystery of the cross. We also acquire by it the knowledge and practice of virtues which render us agreeable to God, which help us avoid sin and obtain salvation. The Passion of our Lord establishes and confirms our faith, for it is the exact and literal fulfilment of the prophecies, and the manifest explanation of the figures of the Old Law. Without the dolorous sacrifice the Jewish dispensation would

be inexplicable. The Old Testament would be, in the words of St. John, a book sealed with seven seals; and no one on earth or in Heaven could be found to open it or to see what it contains.\* “But I see,” he continues, “before the heavenly throne the Lamb slain for the sins of the world. I see Him breaking the seals and opening the mysterious book. I prostrate myself before Him, like the four-and-twenty ancients, and with them I exclaim: Thou alone, O Lord, hast power to open this sacred book and make it known to us, for Thou hast broken the seals by which it has been closed to us. For Thou hast been put to death, and Thou hast redeemed us with Thy blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” Jesus Christ, in dying, cast a divine light upon the Old Law, and all its obscurities disappeared. Its sacrifices, rites, priesthood, precepts, figures, all had reference to this immolation. All great events, from the beginning of the world, appear to have been prearranged by His providence to announce Him and to prepare for Him, the greatest of them all. The prophets appear to be rather historians of a past event than the inspired oracles of something in the distant future. With the greatest exactness

\* Apoc. v.

they foretell the most minute circumstances of the Passion. Incredulous men, who pretend to cast doubts upon the truths of religion, take in one hand the Old Testament, and in the other the history of the sufferings of the Saviour as they are related in the Gospels, and tell us, was it mere chance that caused such a perfect agreement between the fulness of the predictions and all the particulars of the event? What can you oppose to such demonstrative proof? Will you deny the reality of the prophecies? We have received them from the Jews, the mortal enemies of Christ; and long before His time they had been translated into the most common languages of mankind, and had been widely circulated through the whole world. Will you call in question the truth of the Gospel history? It was written only a very few years after the death of the Saviour, by eye-witnesses of the event, and in the presence of those who had been its instigators, authors, and agents. Yet who dared raise the least doubt in regard to the smallest details?

Whilst the Passion is the strongest support of our faith, it is also the firmest foundation of our hope. This is the reasoning of St. Paul. "He who spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not also, with



Him, given us all things?" \* Jesus Christ has fastened to the cross the handwriting of sin and death, blotting it out with His blood, trampling over the princes of darkness and destroying their power.† The same Apostle tells us that because He loved us, therefore He delivered Himself for us.‡ How can we receive with sufficient gratitude all that is contained in this blessed word? It gives us clearly to understand what we may hope from the intensity of the love which has already done so much for us. I am assured of it; He will not allow the fruits of so much suffering to wither and die. It is only by my own wayward folly that I can lose them. If I am sensible of what He has done for me, and put no obstacles in the way, He will surely complete the work. He would not have opened Heaven to me by His death if He did not desire me to enter it by mine. Therefore, sinners though we be, let us gather around the holy cross—it is the throne of His mercy; there He will receive us with open arms. Criminals though we be, let us have hope at the sight of this sacred sign of our salvation. One drop of this precious blood is sufficient to wash out the sins of the world.

The love shown us by our Lord in His Pas-

\* Romans viii. 32.

† Col. ii. 14, 15.

‡ Gal. ii. 20.

sion ought to excite in us another sentiment still more necessary than hope. Oh! the deplorable perversion of ideas! Oh! the sad denial of truth in practice! God has so loved the world as to give for it His own Son; and the world still continues an enemy of God! What motive more powerful could He place before us? What means more efficacious could He use to win our love? If the prodigy of God's love for us is incomprehensible, is that of our insensibility less so? Ingratitude is held in such horror among men that even those who are not grateful pretend to be so. This benefit of His love is so signal that it transcends all our ideas. The thought of it should, while making us blush, also make us sensible that we glory in our ingratitude. God once said to His chosen people: "What more could I have done for My vineyard than I have done?" With how much more reason could he say the same of those whom He purchased by His blood? So far as we can, let us form an idea of our Lord's sufferings for us. It is God Himself, the Supreme Ruler, the Creator of all things, that immolates Himself for a weak and vile creature. It is a God sacrificing Himself for a creature who has often offended Him, and who continues to offend Him. It



is a God who reduces Himself to the last degree of abasement and to the most cruel torments for this creature so criminal towards Him. It is a God who submits to frightful evils to raise a revolted creature to the height of glory and happiness. What does He ask in return for all these favors? Only that we love Him. Ah! if this love should cease to be a duty, ought we not to make of it an honor? Is it not shameful for us that God should be obliged to command it? "Let us, then, love God, who first loved us." At the foot of the cross let us be penetrated with this love, and if we are not called upon to die for Him, let us, at least, live for Him by serving Him.

The love shown us in the Passion is not merely speculative. In it our Lord, charged with our sins, performs for them an authentic, solemn, and entire penance. Yes, God, who is Sanctity itself, becomes a penitent! What a lesson is here given to those who were born in sin and who have lived in sin. Let us not deceive ourselves, however, with the false idea that, after the penance performed for us by Him, we are thereby dispensed from this duty. On the contrary, His penance is an encouragement to ours, and a model of what it ought

to be. The chalice of His Passion, which He drank to the dregs, He desires us to drink also. Every one must accept either salutary penance or avenging justice. Let us voluntarily accept trials, now that they may save us, instead of being forced to accept worse on the day of eternal wrath. The utility and saving virtue of our penances are derived from that of Jesus Christ. His desires give value to ours; His tears to ours; His macerations to ours. Had He not repaired our loss, all our attempts would have been vain. If we do not join with Him in the work of our restoration it remains a dead work, because separated from the principle of life. His penance is the supplement of ours, which without it would be of no effect. Ours is the complement of His, which without ours could not be applied to us. Let us, then, in union with Him, expiate our sins, and we shall appropriate His merits as our own. In union with Him our penance will be a worthy homage to God; but for this purpose it must bear a true likeness to His. We cannot equal His, but we must strive to imitate it. We cannot attain salvation if we are not conformed to the penitential life of Christ. His penance possesses two qualities which ought to be found in ours:

a sorrow of heart, lively and profound, and a full satisfaction for the sins with which we have been charged. From His example let us excite the one and perform the other. The essence of penance is sorrow for sin. This is what we must realize when we behold our Saviour in all the sad circumstances of His Passion. Would that we could truthfully add that the same may be seen in the majority of Christians! But where shall we find these bitter tears for sin? In these days of salvation we see numbers approach the sacred tribunal; but among them how many are truly penitent? Confession, I fear, is much more common than contrition. Let us enter into ourselves, and, calling to mind the penances of our past life, let us consider how different they are from those of our Divine Master. Can we make the comparison without trembling? On this divine model let us henceforth form our lives; let the sentiments of sorrow which we are to bring to the tribunal of reconciliation be like unto His. Alas! when shall we be converted, if it cannot be accomplished by the thought and the example of our Divine Redeemer?

In weeping for our sins our Lord has expiated them, and He points out the way in which we are to apply His merits to ourselves.

It is not sufficient for us to be sorry for our sins, but we must likewise endeavor to repair the injury they have done us. We cannot be truly sorry for that to which we are unwilling to apply a remedy. But, who are they who follow the example of our Redeemer, and seriously labor to expiate their faults by the salutary rigors of true penance? I seek for them among great and well-known sinners, but I find them among saints. On the one side I behold those who have offended God the longest, the most grievously, and the most scandalously, continue to live in sensuality and luxury of all kinds; whilst they consider themselves great penitents if they merely perform the light penances imposed upon them by the minister of the sacrament, adding, perhaps, some pious works of their own choice. On the other side, I see persons truly religious, who perhaps have never been guilty of a mortal sin, impose upon themselves the severest mortifications, afflicting their flesh with all manner of austerities, and always fearing that they do not sufficiently atone for the sins with which they reproach themselves. Of these two classes, differing so widely in principle and in practice, which is guilty of self-deception? Consider Jesus Christ

in His Passion, and answer. "Look," says the Holy Spirit, "and make according to the pattern that was shown thee on the mount." \*

Satisfaction for sin, as we see it in the Passion of our Lord, and as it ought to be in our lives, should have two distinct qualities: humiliation of the heart and mortification of the flesh. Pride is the origin of all sin;† and, being the first link in that long and heavy chain embracing the whole succession of ages and the whole extent of the world, retains the human race in a state of damnation and tinges with its peculiar malice all other sins; for every sin is a revolt against God, and, therefore, a sin of pride. Jesus Christ, by His humiliations, satisfies the glory of God directly attacked by pride, and shows us how we are to attain the same end. In becoming man He degraded Himself, and His whole life was a constant practice and example of humility. But, in His Passion, He goes beyond all our conceptions of humiliation. From the moment of His arrest in the garden till His last sigh on the cross He proceeded from one disgraceful torture to another more disgraceful. Not content with receiving a few outrages, He is saturated with them. He is

\* Exod. xxv. 40.

† Tobias iv. 14.



hardly any longer a man; He is the reproach of men and the outcast of the people.\* We would not dare use these expressions if they were not given to us in Holy Writ. To expiate our pride He was degraded to this extremity; and how can, we in sight of this, continue in our pride? It was our sins that brought Him to this; and they do not put us to shame. O great God! what a difference between Jesus Christ and those who call themselves His disciples! They blush not to have caused such profound humiliations. They dare call themselves Christians whilst rejecting the fundamental virtue of Christianity. They dare call themselves penitents whilst rejecting the most important requirement of penance, which is humiliation. But you who are truly pious will always follow your Divine Master. You will suffer disgrace and trials because He has given you the example. From these humiliations, be assured, great glory will come to you. Listen to St. Paul: "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; *wherefore*, God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above every other name, that in the name of

\* Psalm xxi. 7.

Jesus every knee should bow of those that are in heaven, on earth, and in hell.” \* You also, because your hearts are conformed to the humility of the Divine Model, will be crowned with glory on the day of judgment. “He that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

To His humiliations our Blessed Lord also added sufferings the most intense. The consideration of all the torments of His Passion is calculated to break the strongest spirit. From the head crowned with thorns to the feet pierced with nails there is no soundness in Him.† All the wounds with which He is covered are so many tongues by which He preaches mortification to us. We imagine ourselves to be penitent without practising the works of genuine penance; and only because we have corrected a few faults, and abstained from a few excesses. This is not true Christian penance; for the holy Apostle tells us again that they “who are Christ’s will mortify the flesh with its vices and concupiscences.”‡ A prevailing prejudice in the world is disposed to confine mortification to the cloister; and, in fact, makes of it a virtue fit only for solitaries. Is it true,

\* Phil. ii. 8, 9, 10.

† Isaiah i. 6.

‡ Gal. v. 24.

then, that the saints of different conditions in life, of different states, of various degrees of sanctity, were all solitaries? Is it possible that one Christian can be sanctified by a sensual life, whilst austerities are absolutely required for another? Let us not be deceived; it is impossible to follow Christ to Heaven if we follow Him not in the road of His Passion. To be co-heirs with Christ in glory, we must suffer with Him on earth.\*

Let us bear in mind the instructions given us by our Lord in His Passion taken in this general way. In the following considerations the successive circumstances of His Passion will, one by one, suggest many others.

\* Rom. viii. 17.

III.

*JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF OLIVES.*





### III.

#### JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF OLIVES.

“Then He said unto them: My soul is sorrowful even unto death.” (Matt. xxvi. 38.)

THE Passion of our Blessed Saviour was at hand. He now approached the end of His earthly career. It only remained for Him to finish the work which He had come from Heaven to accomplish, and to crown His wonderful life by a still more wonderful death. Before consummating His sacrifice He was pleased, by an effort of His infinite goodness and power, to perpetuate it to the end of ages by the institution of the Holy Eucharist. Then leaving the supper-table, accompanied by His Apostles, He took the road once trodden by David in his flight from the rebellious Absalom, passed the brook of Cedron, and ascended Mount Olivet. But between Him and David there is a striking difference. David fled from his enemies; Christ goes to meet His. David fled to save his life; Christ advanced to give up His. David ascended the mountain weeping; Christ as-

cended joyfully. Arrived at the particular spot named Gethsemani, He entered the garden in which He had often previously prayed. Then leaving His other Apostles, He took with Him three, who appear to have been constantly His most intimate confidants, and who had witnessed His transfiguration on Mount Thabor. These were Peter, and the sons of Zebedee, James and John.

This retirement of Jesus Christ with only three of His disciples affords us a special instruction. By it He teaches us to admit to the privacy of our prayers, of our good works, of our temptations, of our trials, of all in fact that relates to matters of conscience, only a few trusted friends ; and among them only the most worthy of such confidence. It is a sentiment of vanity that animates certain devout souls, or such as pretend to be so, that all the world must know what passes in their interior ; must know the good they are doing, which they fail not to exaggerate, and their failings, which they make sure to diminish. To put ourselves to special pains to occupy the minds of others with our affairs is a spirit out of harmony with the Gospel. But we need not fear that our good works will want witnesses. There is One to

whom they are well known; to whom alone we should wish to have them known; and the more our humility screens them from other eyes the more value they will acquire in His.

The Passion of our Lord began the moment He entered the garden. "He began to fear and to be sad." A mortal fear seized Him. He made known to His disciples His state of dereliction. The very same person who, a short time before, had mentioned His approaching trials with composure, who made all necessary dispositions with admirable tranquillity, is now all at once cast down. The transition from calm to agitation is sudden indeed. And is He not the strength of the weak, the consolation of the afflicted, the joy of all the blessed spirits? Where now is His divine power? Where is His sovereign blessedness? This apparent contradiction will disappear when we consider with St. Augustine that, on account of the intimate union of His divine and human natures, His actions always assumed the appearance of the one and the other. Although these two natures were really distinct, yet in their operations they appeared to be confounded. This blending of the divine and human natures in our Lord appears nowhere more man-

ifest than in the Garden of Olives. God and man successively and unmistakably appear. Let us contemplate this new Jacob contending in the gloom of night against the anger of the Almighty. There He is just as He had been described six centuries previously by the prophet: "My heart is broken within Me; all My bones tremble."\* In His deep sorrow where does He seek solace? Several times He seeks it from His Father and from His disciples. He begs it from Heaven and from earth; and Heaven and earth conspire to refuse it and to leave Him, in the excess of His affliction, entirely to Himself. Then, turning from His apostles, He bends His knees in prayer. It is in prayer we find the greatest and most solid consolation. To dissipate their sorrow men of the world often deliver themselves up to pleasures, even to the point of dissoluteness; but the true Christian will always seek solace from evil in the bosom of God. How can men of faith fill up the void ever left in the heart by dissipation with other dissipations? Pleasures may distract the mind for the moment, and turn it away from the serious evils with which it is afflicted, but these come back with

\* Jer. xxiii. 9.

more bitter and cutting power ; it is religion alone that can turn evil into good, for it makes of evil a means of uniting man's heart more firmly to God. You afflict yourself with the thought of your loss, your sickness, your disgrace, your humiliation ; know you not that it is God who arranged this for you, that you may have the opportunity of meriting His reward ? Think only that it is offered to you in the providence of God, and that, united with the sufferings of Christ, it will become a principle of your elevation in His sight. There cannot be a thought more salutary for the future life, or more consoling in the present, than that of the advantage of tribulations received in the spirit of penance. Jesus Christ separated Himself from His disciples to show us that, free from all company of men, our prayer is more fervent, our intercourse with God more intimate. In the midst of men it is difficult not to be distracted by their words and actions ; it is difficult to guard ourselves from the thoughts which surrounding objects present to our minds. In retirement the mind concentrates itself ; nothing turns it aside, nothing comes between it and God. Thus we read in Holy Writ : "I will lead her in-



to the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart.”\*

The prayer of Christ should be the model of ours. “Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me; nevertheless not as I will but as Thou wilt.”† He does not employ many words; but rather adheres to the substance of His request. He explains to His Father His desire to be freed from the torments about to fall upon Him. If it is *not* heard what shall become of Him? If it *is* heard what shall become of us? Let us not despair; our Lord is troubled at the approach of His Passion; but He does not fly from it. He feels the bitterness of His chalice; but He does not refuse to drink it. So also in our pains of the temporal order; we are not forbidden to desire to be freed from them, and to demand it of God. It is a natural sentiment; and the Author of nature and religion does not oppose one to the other. The Church, always assisted and inspired by her Divine Spouse, has recourse to Him in the calamities which afflict nations, imploring Him by public prayers that wars, tempests, and all other scourges may cease. She begs for healthy seasons, for the fertility of the earth, the preservation of sovereigns, the prosperity of

\* Osee ii. 14.

† Matt. xxvi. 39.



kingdoms. No doubt goods of the spiritual order are infinitely more important than those merely temporal, and ought to form the principal object of our petitions ; but we are not required to occupy ourselves solely with these. We should give them the preference, but not to the exclusion of the others. And it is from God we must ask all. In laboring to procure the fruits of the earth—for such is the command of God—we should not lose sight of two special thoughts ; first, that our labors would be useless without God's blessing, which we are obliged to ask ; and, secondly, that if, in His Divine wisdom, which knows our wants and will not fail to supply them, He should withhold this blessing, we must still say : “Not my will but Thine be done.” Thus our prayers for temporal blessings should ever be conditional and subject to the supreme will of God. Let us sincerely imitate the resignation of our Lord in His agony, and we shall receive our reward. Yet, let us ask ourselves, is this submission to the divine will, which we outwardly profess, true, absolute, and universal, like the submission of Jesus Christ? The chalice which He consented to drink was not of His choosing ; He accepted that which was sent to Him, and we know its frightful bit-

terness. Without exception or restriction, and with a clear knowledge of the humiliations, tortures, and bitter death prepared for Him, He accepted this chalice. By the light of His example let us enter into ourselves, and, confessing our tardy and poor submission to the will of God, let us bravely struggle to follow Christ our Lord. It often happens that, even in our good works, it is not our will that we wish to submit to the will of God, but His will to ours. Yes, we wish what He wishes, provided it contains nothing to humble us, nothing to afflict or mortify us; and if, indeed, we consent to tribulations, we wish them to be those of our own choice, not of His. We suffer to a given point, but not beyond it; we bear this special cross, but not the other. Is not this the full measure of our resignation? Let us judge of it by the impatience we feel, the murmurs we express, the complaints we make even in the smallest trials that afflict us. This is clearly not what our Lord preaches to us in the Garden of Gethsemani. Our submission to the Divine Will should be of the heart, and practical; of the heart, in that it induces us to receive whatever God sends us joyfully and without a murmur; practical, in that it makes us execute without delay what God is pleased to command.

We may find such an exercise of this virtue onerous and galling. But do we imagine that the service of God requires no sacrifice? Do we think that He consents to accept our service only so far as we please and as we please? Let us rather confide in the aids of His grace to overcome our repugnances. Let us labor to form in our hearts a spirit of resignation resembling that of Jesus Christ. We shall then find nothing so difficult that we cannot undertake; nothing so repulsive that we cannot embrace; nothing so onerous that we cannot bear; nothing so hard that we cannot execute; nothing so fatiguing through which we cannot persevere.

After His prayer our Lord, still troubled by the same agitations, went to seek His three disciples. He had ordered them to await His coming in watching and in prayer; but on His coming they were asleep. On that sad night sleep seemed to settle over all excepting Himself and His enemies. He awaited their hostile approach. They prepared to seize Him. Even His most cherished disciples, to whom He had given many special pledges of His love, and who had so often made protestations of attachment, when they saw Him plunged in the deepest sorrow, instead of sympathizing with Him, abandoned

themselves to sleep and left Him to His afflictions. This is man ; this is as far as we may count upon his attachment ; these are the consolations we may expect from friends. Only one Friend remains to us always ; only one Friend that changes not in our regard till we shall have changed towards Him ; who, even when we do abandon Him, does not abandon us, but seeks us and presses us by all the arts of His love, by all means natural and supernatural, interior and exterior, to come back to Him. The friends we meet in this world are generally like the comforters of holy Job, to whom he said : “ I have often heard such things as these ; you are all troublesome comforters.” \* Let us have recourse in our trials to the Consoler of all the afflicted, and we shall not be disappointed. With His accustomed sweetness our Lord reproached His disciples on account of their sleeping in such circumstances, and took occasion from it to give us a double lesson—a precept and a maxim : “ Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” †. Our Lord frequently recommends watching and prayer, each an essential practice in itself, and both forming the founda-

\* Job xvi. 2.

† Matt. xxvi. 41.

tion of the true Christian character. They are, of all others, the two means most adapted to prevent temptations and to resist them. Constant vigilance foresees the occasions of temptation; fervent prayer obtains the power to vanquish it. Vigilance prevents surprise; prayer prevents defeat. Of ourselves we are weak indeed; we must implore the necessary succor. In giving it God wishes us not to be idle, but on our guard. By watchfulness we do what is in us; by prayer we obtain what is wanting to us. Our Lord also gives to the Apostles and to us a reason why we should watch and pray: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Which of us does not feel the full force of this maxim? How often have we not learned it by sad experience? The levity of the spirit, the weakness of the flesh; behold the two principal causes of our fall, the two most powerful weapons of our enemy. Sometimes he attacks us unaware, in moments of distraction, and makes an easy conquest; but his success is more frequently achieved through our weakness. This is the most dangerous of his attacks, because our carnal affections conspire with him and he finds within us most powerful allies. Let us employ against him the weapons proposed by



our Divine Master ; let us conquer our levity by vigilance and our weakness by the power of prayer.

But the anguish of our Lord, far from growing less, continually increases. Three times He implores consolation from His Father in the words : “If it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me” ; and in seeking consolation from His disciples He finds them again asleep. Will He be abandoned by all ? Is He to be left alone in His extreme affliction ? Angels of heaven ! who came to announce His birth to the world, who followed Him to the desert, and who appeased His hunger after His long fast, where are you in this sad and doleful scene ? Will you remain tranquil in the enjoyment of your beatitude whilst the Author of all your happiness is plunged into the very abyss of grief ? But I see a blessed spirit descend from heaven. By His persevering prayer our Lord obtains this succor. And in what does the comfort consist which is thus sent Him by His Father ? We know not what was the nature of it, but we know its effect. The angel sustains Him, but does not release Him ; he helps our Lord to bear His sufferings, but does not diminish them. On the contrary, we find that soon after this apparition His agony becomes more in-



tense and reaches its climax. Then it was that what never happened to any mortal, and probably never will happen, what physical science is unable to explain, Jesus Christ felt in an instant; for we read that, "being in agony, He prayed the longer, and His sweat became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground." \* What are the causes of this so sad and so extraordinary condition of our Redeemer? They are the violent conflicts raging in His soul. They are the conflict between His submission to the Divine Will and the torments to which He is about to submit Himself; a conflict between His horror of sin and the sight of all the sins with which He sees Himself charged; a conflict between the desire of our salvation and the sight of the large numbers for whose salvation He dies in vain.

Our Lord distinctly sees all His humiliations, all His sufferings, and the terrible death He is about to suffer. This frightful scene comes before Him in advance and all at once. But had He not seen them from all eternity? Had He not predicted them? Had He not ardently desired them? Certainly; but it is a part of the divine decree that His soul should escape no anguish, as His body should be spared no pain.

\* Luke xxii. 43, 44.

This explains why God impressed Him with such a terror of what He was to suffer. He could, without doubt, free Himself from all this sorrow by the exercise of His supreme power; but He would not. He desired not only to expiate our sins, but also to give us an example of unparalleled patience and resignation. If he had been afflicted in the garden only to the point of sufferings and death, we could hardly conceive the anguish into which He was plunged; but when we call to mind that, from the first instant of His Passion, all the sins of the human race were upon Him—that He was covered with them, and that they became His own, then we may form some idea of the agony and sweat of blood. It is in this state He presents Himself to His Father; in this state He sees Himself. Finite beings that we are, we cannot fully know the deformity of sin. As sinners we cannot properly feel it. It is only God Himself that can know how much sin ought to be detested. In considering the infinite sanctity of our Saviour it is not, therefore, His agony that so much astonishes us, but rather the fact that His humanity could bear it at all, and that the horror with which He was penetrated and the interior suffering with which He was crushed did not cause instantaneous death.

Again, that which contributed to the awful agony of our Lord in another respect, was the clear knowledge He had of the little fruit His Passion would produce in the majority of men. The future opens to Him its secrets; and what does He find there? Ah! this ought to be for us, rather than for Him, a subject of confusion and dismay. He sees all the outrages that will be inflicted upon His grace and love; He sees the blood of the Testament, the blood shed for us, the blood intended to sanctify us, trampled upon and despised by many. He sees the torments He is enduring not only useless to a great number, but injurious to them. Behold, says the royal prophet in His name, "what profit is there in My blood?" \* Is it, then, to no purpose, He asks through St. Paul, that I die? Shall the scandal of the Cross be made vain even by those for whom I have borne it?† Is it astonishing, therefore, that the charity which brought our Blessed Lord to His death should have afflicted Him and rendered Him desolate at the sight of those to whom it would be rather a cause of destruction than of salvation?

Shall we, then, who are, the happy objects of

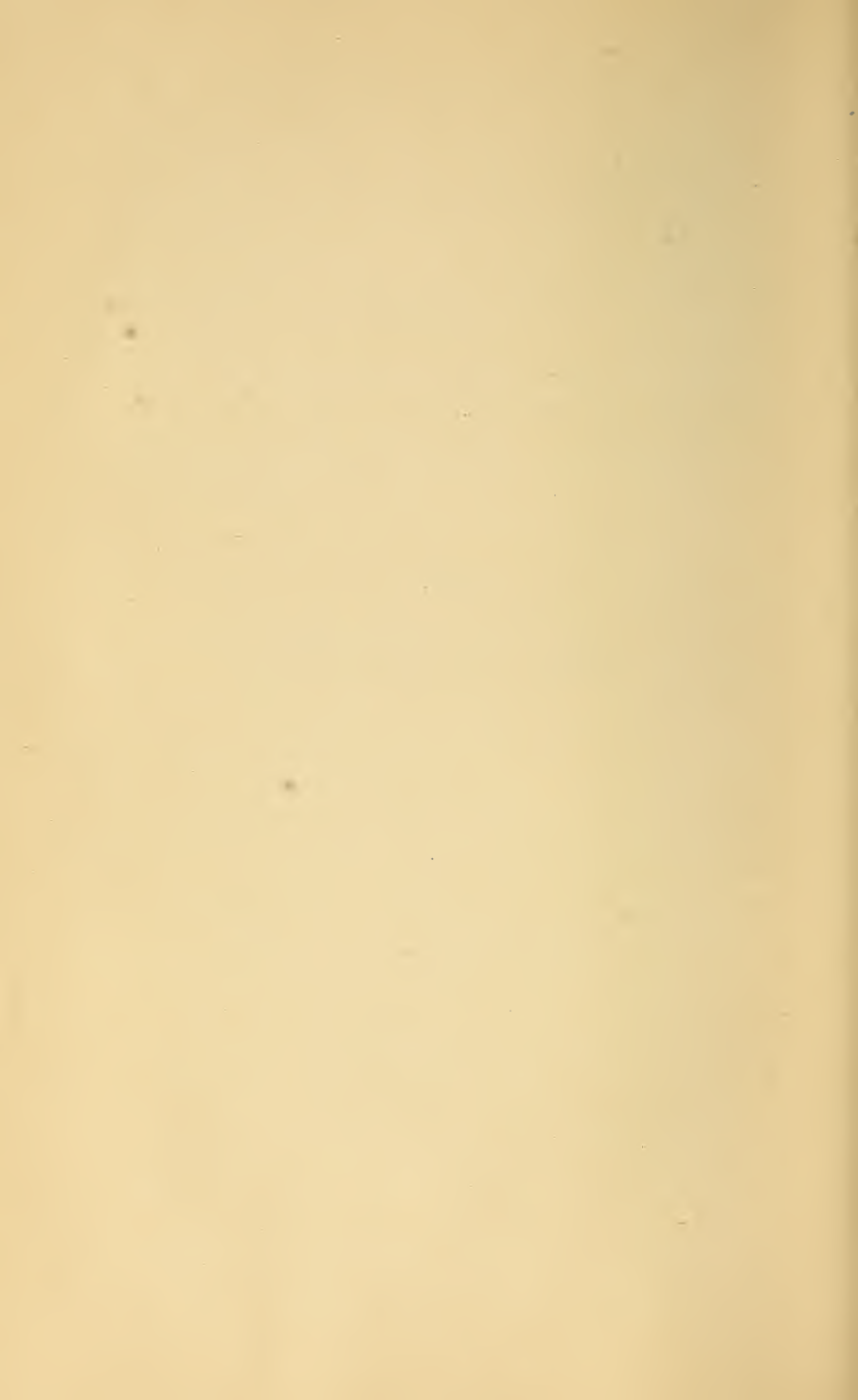
\* Ps. xxix. 10.

† Gal. ii. 21, v. 2

the infinite mercy of our God, on seeing Him so full of anguish at the sight of our loss, continue in our gross and brutal insensibility? We shall never really conceive such a horror for sin as that by which He was afflicted; but let us, at least, beg of Him a part of that spirit of contrition which filled His heart, and, uniting our feeble sorrow with His, let us make a constant effort to imitate Him.

IV.

*JESUS IS APPREHENDED.*





## IV.

### JESUS IS APPREHENDED.

“Behold the hour is at hand, and the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of sinners.” (Matt. xxvi. 45.)

WE have seen our Divine Saviour a prey to grief the most excessive; His soul crushed by sadness and terror, and His body broken by the weight of the evils He bore and the evils He foresaw. But a spectacle altogether different suddenly attracts our attention. From the depth of a debasement never equalled in the history of man, Jesus Christ appears in all His greatness, in all His majesty, in all His power. For a few moments the Godhead appears in Him, in order that His humiliation might stand out in stronger relief. Not in the common, human way and by slow degrees does He recover from His agony. Between the mortal struggle which purpled the earth with a sweat of blood and the heroic firmness which He displays, there is no interval. Instantaneously, by an effort of His omnipotence, He passed from one state to the other, as He afterwards passed from death

to life. Relieved from His most abject condition, He goes to arouse His Apostles. He declares to them that the fatal moment is come, that the traitor is at hand. Indeed, He is at once surrounded by a numerous troop, armed with swords and clubs, sent to arrest Him by the chief priests and ancients of the people.

With what precision our Lord foresaw the moment in which His executioners were to seize Him ! He had clearly seen all the intrigues, all the plots of His enemies. He had assisted at all the councils in which His destruction was sworn ; He was a witness of the infamous bargain made with Judas. In a moment He saw a band of assassins approach Him. He had followed all their steps, or at least, by His supreme will, He made them correspond with His designs, so that they came before Him at the very moment decreed in His divine providence. So thoroughly aware of the coming of his enemies, He could easily have eluded their grasp. Thus when, at Nazareth, they forced Him to the edge of a precipice in order to cast Him down, He passed unhurt from among them, and they could not prevent it.\* So also when, at Jerusalem, they tried to stone Him to death, He concealed Himself from their

\* Luke iv. 29, 30.

sight and departed from the temple.\* But now His hour is come ; advancing voluntarily and with firmness, He submits to all that it brings.

Therefore, says the Evangelist, Jesus proceeds, with a certainty of all that is to happen, to meet His assassins, and shows neither fear nor confusion nor emotion. He is the first to speak ; He asks whom they seek, and to their answer He replies : “ I am He.” Let us pause and admire the courage which sets at naught the most frightful evils ; let us also admire the prudence which regulates and the obedience which directs that courage. He does not enter into the conflict until He is fitted for it by prayer ; and He awaits the hour fixed in His decrees to deliver Himself to His sufferings. It was the time in which He wished them to come ; He did not allow them to anticipate His will. Thus He teaches us to be ready to accept anything that may come from the hand of God, and to be disposed by prayer to receive it with resignation.

The words, “ I am He,” which for Him are a signal of suffering and death, are for those who come to arrest Him like a stroke of lightning. They are prostrated upon the earth.† They come to put Him in their power ; and behold, they

\* John viii. 59.

† John xviii. 6.

are in His. What use does He make of it? His own indulgence inspires it. He only wished to show His power, but not to use it; to make them feel the merit of His sacrifice, but not to prevent it. He immediately allows them to rise. But this prodigy of power and goodness on His part is followed by a prodigy of blindness and madness on theirs. They are neither moved by the superhuman force displayed in their regard nor by the favor which is accorded them. This conduct of the Jews surprises us. Alas! let us think of ourselves. Ungrateful that we are, how often has He lifted us up from the grasp of sin, and how often have we fallen again! The very afflictions which sometimes follow from our sins have not always the power to bind us to Him. Like the enemies of Christ, the tools of the Sanhedrim, we have neither been stricken by His chastisements nor moved by His favors.

Figure to yourselves, then, lions about to devour their prey. It is the image presented to us in the language of the royal prophet. They fall upon him all at once and hold him fast. Behold the innocent Lamb of God in the fangs of lions! But He is still their Master, and will remain so as long as He wishes. Another prodigy of His power and goodness now shows itself,

The Apostles, up to this moment, had been quiet spectators of what was passing; but at last, fearing danger to the person of their Divine Master, they feel it a duty to defend Him. It is certainly a duty to defend Him when He is attacked, and we have many occasions to exercise it. How often do we see Him attacked by the sophistries and raileries of infidelity! How do we act on those occasions? Do we feel it to be a duty to avenge the Divine Majesty, and to refute, as far as in us lies, the outrages offered to Him, and to erase the evil impressions of such discourse? Instead of this do we not countenance the impiety by a guilty silence? And thus do we not appear to take part with the enemies of our Lord? Before acting, the Apostles consulted their Master and asked Him if they would draw the sword. Their conduct herein is admirable. It shows their love of Jesus Christ, which induced them to resist the injury inflicted upon Him; it shows their courage also, which did not allow them to doubt but that with only two swords they could disarm a multitude; it showed their obedience, too, which induced them to await the instructions of their Divine Lord. They were mistaken, indeed; they did not understand thus far the mystery of the sufferings and death



of Jesus. It was their error, but not their fault as they looked for the decision of their Saviour. God does not impute to us as faults those errors into which we fall in regard to points not yet decided ; but He requires us to be ever ready to submit our opinions and our actions to whatever He may demand of us through His mouth-piece, the Church. One of the Apostles, however, Peter, the first among them, and whom we find the most zealous for the glory of his Divine Master, without waiting for an answer drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, a servant of the high-priest. Peter erred in this ; there was precipitation in his act ; he should not have anticipated the word of his Master. His indiscreet zeal might have provoked a combat and caused the effusion of blood. In blaming his ardor we must at least respect his motive ; and if it be impossible to justify his conduct, we may excuse it. Jesus Christ also permitted this act of His disciple, that He might show His divine authority and power. Quiet follows from one word of His ; not only the Apostles but the Jews also, whom the violence of Peter might have irritated, become tranquil. Thus also on the lake of Galilee He once commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm.



Now He is in the hands of His enemies; He is their captive; it is the hour of their fierce anger; but, even when they had received a plausible excuse for resorting to extreme measures, with one word He arrests and disarms their fury. What greatness amid the abasement to which He delivers Himself! What astonishing dignity, that impresses so wonderfully those who hold Him in their clutches and yet obey His orders! He touches the ear of the servant Malchus and he is immediately healed. In this one act he effects two wonders, one of His power and the other of His goodness. Barbarians and heathens would have been touched with admiration and gratitude; but impious men, though claiming to be the chosen people of God, are not affected. Their hearts are like stone; their minds are darkness itself. The Jews, who had been accustomed to see His miracles, were only more hardened against this grand proof of His Divinity. The continuance of these miracles, which, reasonably, should have convinced and converted them, had the very opposite effect.

After our Lord had restrained the impetuosity of St. Peter He gave him instructions which are most applicable to us. "Put up again thy sword," He says, "into its place;

for all that take the sword shall perish by the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot ask My Father, and He will give Me presently more than twelve legions of angels?" \* In His teaching He had often recommended meekness, and His whole life was an example of it. Calumniated, contradicted, pursued, and assailed by numerous and furious enemies, He never allowed a word or a gesture of impatience or ill-humor to escape Him. Ever calm in the midst of their turbulence, He opposed to their violence, patience; to their hatred, charity; to their outrages, blessings; to their persecutions, benefits. It is, above all, in His sacred Passion that we gather these instructions. Thus, when the fury of His enemies reached the height of its malice, His sweetness and meekness were redoubled. In healing Malchus He gives an example of this. He also gives us a lesson in this circumstance. He clearly condemns what we call *the code of honor*, as false, absurd, and criminal, opposed alike to reason, religion, and the civil law. This code  
1 pretends to wash out the stain of insult and injury by blood; it is only a miserable relic of the barbarism of our ancestors, to which we join, by a monstrous union, the most sanguinary maxims

\* Matt. xxvi. 52, 53.

of our corrupt age and effeminate manners, thus uniting the vices of all ages in our own. It is especially forbidden to the Apostles destined by our Lord to found His Church. They are required, by His example, to establish and extend His holy religion, but by no other weapons than those of meekness and charity, patience and prayer. They are forbidden to shed any blood but their own in the accomplishment of this great work. We ministers of the altar, successors of the Apostles, must constantly bear in mind this great precept of our Redeemer. No blind or violent zeal should ever carry us beyond the bounds of charity. By meekness the world has been conquered to Christ; by meekness alone shall the conquest be preserved. All that is necessary to maintain it we should suffer; but we should inflict no suffering on others. Efficaciously to carry on the work of Christ we must continue it as He commenced. To St. Peter our Lord renews His instruction: "How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that so it must be done?" \* Often before He had declared that in His Passion all things relating to the Messiah should be accomplished in Him.† But the Jews, preoccupied with the

\* Matt. xxvi. 54.

† Luke xxiv. 44.

idea of a Christ glorious, triumphant, and founding a temporal kingdom, could not reconcile it with His constant teachings of poverty and suffering. It is nevertheless the most detailed part of their prophecies, and, consequently, the best adapted to make them recognize the heavenly Envoy. It was that part He most insisted upon as having been taught to their fathers. The Apostles and Evangelists constantly refer to it in their recital of the Passion. They are most careful to place alongside of every circumstance they relate a corresponding passage of the Old Testament announcing it. What, then, did this blind and perverse people seek? What could they desire in proof of His coming? But they confound all ideas of His spiritual kingdom in the vision of a great and prosperous reign of the temporal order. This spiritual kingdom easily explains all obscure passages in the sacred writings; it renders plain all that had been so often foretold regarding the sufferings and humiliations of Christ. Better instructed than they, and hence more fortunate, let us profit by the light which they shut out from their eyes. Let us meditate upon the wonderful accord between the Old and the New Testaments—one containing the prophecies relating to the Passion, and the



other recounting its minutest circumstances—so as to strengthen our faith and render it invincible. Finally, our Lord, again addressing His Apostles, says: “The chalice which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?” \* Let us often apply this word to ourselves. At every privation, at every painful occurrence, at every tribulation or humiliation of what kind soever, let us say with our Lord: Shall I not drink of the chalice given me by my Father? It is a necessity, for I have inherited sin from my father Adam. It is a duty, for my Saviour and all the saints have shown me the way. It is an advantage, for there is no other way of going to Heaven. It is a blessing, “for that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.” †

After having thus instructed His Apostles He addressed Himself to the Jews who had bound Him and held Him in their power. But with what tranquillity; with what sweetness amid injuries; with what firmness and dignity amid all manner of contemptuous treatment! “Are you come out,” He said, “as it were against a thief, with swords and clubs?” ‡ In what particular

\* John xviii. 11.

† 2 Cor. iv. 17.

‡ Luke xxii. 52.

had He shown Himself to be a violent or a dangerous man? Had He ever done the smallest evil to any one that could give a color of justice to the affronts now offered to Him? His whole life had been employed in doing good, and perhaps to those even who come to torment Him. Often threatened, He never resisted, but only turned aside to avoid the attack. And yet why this cruel preparation? Why this numerous troop? Why these swords and clubs? It would seem that He was a leader of brigands, conspiring against the state and having command of a formidable force.

Again He reminded the Jews that He had taught daily in their temple and that they had not laid hands upon Him. "But this," said He, "is your hour and the power of darkness." \* Three years He had traversed Judea, filling it with His miracles and teachings; but He was the constant object of the hatred of three special classes—the priests, the doctors, and the Pharisees. The pride of some, the envy of others, the hypocrisy of all; every passion that He condemned; every vice that He labored to root out during these years, conspired against Him, but in vain. The storm was constantly gathering

\* Luke xxii. 53.



around Him, but it failed to touch Him. Yet He always proceeded with the greatest independence. Ever in the midst of enemies possessing authority and power, continually an object of their rage and deceit, He always dissipated their vain projects. Apparently able to seize Him and punish Him at all times, yet they had not the power, though they had the will. Renewing every day their snares to destroy Him, they were always disconcerted ; an invisible barrier shielded Him from their attempts. But now this barrier, hitherto impenetrable, has fallen. Now they surround Him ; now they possess His person. Whence this sudden change? He explains it; He gives the reason for their former impotence and their present strength. *Your hour is now come.* If they hold Him in their grasp, it is because He willed it and it is when He willed it. The hour which they esteem most fortunate for them is in truth the most fatal. They rejoice in having the victim of their fury within their power ; one day they will be the victims of His justice.

Although apprehended by His enemies, and maltreated by them as their captive, He yet commands them and they obey. "If, therefore, you seek Me," said He, "let these [the disciples] go

their way.” \* Of all these furious men, maddened by the attack of St. Peter, not one dares lay hands on any of the Apostles, so full of dignity and power, even in His present state, is the manner of our Lord. These faithful followers shall indeed one day participate in the lot of their Master ; *they shall indeed drink of His chalice*. As He predicted, they will be brought before councils, princes, and magistrates ; they will be delivered up by their friends, and will suffer scourging, outrage, and death.† But before these evils and tortures will have been inflicted upon them they will have performed mighty labors ; and martyrdom will not be their lot until the works of the apostolate are finished. They must survive their Divine Master, to continue the work commenced by Him ; and, like Him, to live and die in that work. It was announced by our Lord, and one of the Evangelists mentions it, that of those who were given to Him as disciples only one was lost—that one who was to deliver Him to His enemies. Let us here admire the spirit and goodness of Christ ; for at the moment in which He is most afflicted He weighs all and rules all. And that which occupies Him

\* John xviii. 2.

† Luke xxi. 12.

most is not the thought of Himself, of the evils He feels and foresees; all His care is for His Apostles, all His anxiety is to provide for their safety.

But what will they do who are the object of such tender solicitude? Although they had received such a touching proof of His love, they shamefully abandon Him and hide themselves from the danger to which they are exposed and from which His goodness had just delivered them. The prophet Zachary had already predicted it: "Strike the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered." \* And our Lord made use of these identical words on that very night when He foretold that they would be scandalized in Him.† Where, then, is the zeal which they came to display in His defence? How suddenly it is dissipated! Not only is their courage enfeebled, but their faith also wavers. They desired to avenge their Divine Master and to release Him from the hands of His enemies; they would have desired it much more, perhaps, if they had preserved any hope in Him. But to continue to believe or to hope in Him when they saw Him in this new danger and in this awful state of humiliation—this

\* Zach. xiii. 7.

† Matt. xxvi. 31.

was a trial for which they were not prepared, because they had never understood His words relating to His Passion and Resurrection. How often are we prepared to defend our religion, even with anger, but not to practise it! How many of us seem willing to suffer death with Jesus Christ, but are not willing to bear the least tribulations, the smallest sacrifices, for His sake!

From the flight of the Apostles another most important consideration arises. It is that we receive from themselves the full account of their weakness. Without their relation of it we might never have known it. Is not this a manifest guarantee of the sincerity and the truth of the Gospel which we obtain from them? How can men who with so much honest candor make known their own faults and weaknesses be accused of falsehood?

His enemies, now masters of the sacred person of Jesus Christ, proceed to bind Him with cords. The omnipotent hands, which are capable of breaking the fetters of the human race, are voluntarily presented to His enemies! Like Samson of old, He might easily have broken all these bonds. One act of His will would have suf-

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ficed. But ties stronger than any of man's making bound Him: they were His submission to God's will and His love for us. It is these that bring Him to the various trials to which He is subjected by the rage of His persecutors.





V.

*TREASON AND DESPAIR OF JUDAS.*



## V.

### TREASON AND DESPAIR OF JUDAS.

“Amen, amen, I say to you that one of you will betray Me.”  
(John xiii. 21.)

OF all the trials which most touched the heart of our Blessed Lord in His Passion, none weighed so heavily upon Him as the weaknesses, infidelities, and even perfidies of His own chosen followers. “If,” says He by the royal prophet, “My enemy had reviled Me, I would verily have borne with it. And if he that hated Me had spoken great things against Me, I would, perhaps, have hidden Myself from him. But thou, a man of one mind, My guide and My familiar, who didst take sweet meats together with Me: in the house of God we walked with consent.” \*

But all the other failings of His disciples are, to a certain degree, insignificant when compared with the awful treason of Judas. The very name of this wretch has become infamous in after-ages as common to all traitors; and it is one of the gravest injuries that can be inflicted upon

\* Psalm liv. 13-16.

any one to call him a "Judas." Let us consider his crime in its principle, in itself, in its consequences.

The principle of his crime was avarice. On account of this unworthy sentiment he had blamed the piety of Magdalene, who had poured perfumes upon the feet of our Lord. The Evangelist who mentions this tells us that it was not the misery of the poor, as he pretended, that troubled him; but that he spoke so because he was a thief from the beginning and carried the common purse.\* Great God! A covetous man, a thief, in the company of our Lord! Where, then, will virtue find a sure refuge, if not under the eyes, by the side, almost in the bosom, of Jesus Christ? Where can we find a safe asylum from temptation, if the society of our Saviour be not one? Pious souls, who enjoy the friendship of God, who hold yourselves ever in His presence, who are intimately united with Him, who bear Him in your hearts—what a cause of terror must it be to you to see one so intimate with Him fall into so heinous a crime! What a spur must not this be to your vigilance to look upon a fall so disgraceful, with so many motives and means of preserving himself! And this passion

\* John xii. 6.

grows upon him even when he heard his Master inveigh against riches and say that they should be held in contempt. Yes, and in the presence of that Divine Model of the most complete and perfect abnegation, who had no place on which to lay His head, he allows avarice to possess his heart ! The sacred writer relates a circumstance which was, perhaps, the occasion and first cause of his fall. The office of purse-bearer was obtained by him probably because money had a natural attraction for him. From this we may draw two valuable reflections : first, that the temptations against which we should be particularly on our guard are those connected with our special calling in life ; and, secondly, that we should avoid as much as possible those avocations in which our natural inclinations are most exposed to evil.

But what we should particularly learn from the sin of this Apostle is the extreme danger of the passions and the constant duty of vigilance over them. I hear the incredulous excuse the passions ; it does not surprise me : the passions engender incredulity, and this latter, to propagate its poison, exalts the passions. I see its interested motive, and can find no other reason. Every crime has been committed by one passion



or another; and every passion has committed a multitude of crimes. The incredulous man talks to us of good faith; but let us candidly enter into ourselves and ask ourselves if all the irregularities of our lives are not the offspring of passion? We are told to moderate, regulate, and direct them. It is not sufficient; we must fight them and destroy them as far as we can. There can be no truce with enemies so dangerous and so furious. All who have ever borne the bitter chain of passion know it too well. They are never satisfied; when you have given them full rein, and you think they will ask no more, they exact it and command it with absolute sway. Passion knows no halting-place; it must be a slave or a tyrant. It must be firmly kept under a yoke or else it will assert its power with uncontrolled despotism. To reduce the passions to subjection we must begin the war with them when they first show themselves. If we allow them to grow strong by yielding to their demands they will soon defy our power. You find it difficult to attack this special passion which is agreeable; it is, therefore, more necessary for you to resist it with all your force. The more agreeable it is the more dangerous. If it costs you so much to sacrifice it now, what will

it be when it becomes a habit? Only one thing remains for you to do: repress it. When you are afflicted by one mortal malady will you not take as much pains to be cured of it as if you were oppressed by several diseases? One passion is able to bring you into terrible excesses. Envy caused Cain to kill Abel, his brother; impurity made David an adulterer and a murderer; ambition caused the rebellion of Absalom against his father; and pride induced Aman to give up an entire nation to destruction. Reflect upon the example now under consideration. Judas does not appear to have been a victim to any passion except avarice. Avarice made him a traitor; avarice made him sell the Son of God. "We cannot serve both God and mammon." If we deliver ourselves up to the one we must sacrifice, abjure, and betray the other. Every avaricious and unjust man gives up Christ; not so formally as Judas, but not less in reality. It is Christ he sells in usury, in fraud, in criminal bargains.

This first cause of the crime of Judas brought on another. Deluded by avarice, guilty of many petty thefts, revolving in his mind his awful project, yet did he have the shocking audacity to

receive in this state the Body and Blood of Christ. Then it was that Satan also took possession of him. How dreadful ! The unhappy man receives at the same time Christ and Satan. But with what a difference ! He receives Christ to crucify Him, Satan to be his slave. He receives Christ to deliver Him into the power of Satan, and Satan to crucify Christ. From that moment nothing arrests his downward career. The infernal spirit which now possesses him impels him to the execution of his detestable work, and he makes haste to finish it. During Holy Week we shall see many Christians approach the altar to receive the Body of Jesus Christ ; we shall be edified by the numbers who present themselves. But amid this edification a secret fear comes upon us when we think that the very day of the institution of this sacred banquet a traitor participated therein. We tremble at the thought that among the faithful who receive the Sacrament there may be a Judas. If Jesus Christ should raise His voice at the moment that He is elevated by the priest for adoration, and say, “Amen, amen, I say to you that one of you will betray Me,” \* how great would be our consternation and our horror ! We know

\* John xiii. 21.

no more about the wicked who unworthily receive Him than the Apostles knew about Judas ; we cannot, like St. John, ask Him who it is ; we have no right to suspect any one. But, alas ! when we perceive for many years the little fruit apparently derived from the paschal Communion ; when we see the same kind of lives commenced over again, the same passions indulged in, the same sins committed, how can we avoid the feeling of fear and affliction ? Can we help trembling at the dispositions which preceded these communions when we see the disorders that follow them ? If among those who read these lines there is any one who presumes to present himself at the holy table from unworthy motives and without the necessary preparation, I say to him : Stop ! beware ! Do not take a step that may plunge you into hell for ever. True, you will receive your God, but you will receive Him for your ruin. You will receive Him bringing with Him vengeance instead of benedictions. You will receive Him, indeed, and Satan also. If the crime of Judas has no terror for you, think, at least, of his miserable end.

Judas leaves his Master to put himself at the head of His enemies. What crimes are involved in that which he is about to commit !



Think of his ingratitude. Raised from the ranks of the people to the glory of the apostolate, destined to be one of the princes of the Church, he is promoted to the priesthood. Jesus washes his feet; he gives him his Body and Blood; and at the moment when all these benefits reach their climax Judas goes away to deliver Him into the hands of His executioners. It is avarice. Oh! dreadful sin! We have seen treason committed from inveterate hatred, from violent anger, from the notion of great interests at stake; Judas betrays his Master without any resentment against Him, without anger, without aversion. In cold blood he does it, and entirely to gratify the avarice which rules over him. See the meanness of this passion. It is for thirty miserable pieces of silver, the price of a common slave, that he sells the Saint of saints. He does not even make a bargain; he receives, without question, just what is offered to him. The prophet Zachary had foretold it: "And they weighed for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me: Cast it to the potter, a handsome price indeed that I was priced at by them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and I cast them into

the house of the Lord to the potter.”\* Here He speaks for Judas. Oh! blindness and insensibility! Our Lord, to remind him of what he had already felt in his heart, again positively declares that He would be betrayed. He also mentions the frightful consequences of the great crime.† Judas is not moved; he sees his secret discovered, his sentiments made known, yet he plunges into the awful abyss which his treason has opened for him. All at once he makes himself a felon, an ingrate, guilty of simony, impious, sacrilegious, a deicide. Behold the man who for three years had been the friend and confidant of Jesus Christ, leading to their cruel work His murderers! He takes pains to prevent his prey from escaping; and, lest they should not recognize their victim, he gives them a sign, saying: “Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is He; lay hold on Him, and lead Him away cautiously.”‡ Thus does the traitor deliver his Master with the sign of friendship. Thus does he recommend watchful care in the apprehension of our Lord; for he knows with what facility He can frustrate all their designs. He comes to the consummation of his crime; he comes, at the head

\* Zach. xi. 12, 13.

† Mark xiv. 21.

‡ Ibid 44.



of a cruel cohort, into the presence of his Lord ; he gives the perfidious kiss, and even still presumes to call him *Master*. What will the Saviour do in these awful circumstances? Will He repel the wretch? “Will He kill the impious man by the breath of His lips?”\* Will He call down fire from heaven, as Elias did, to destroy him? Oh! unspeakable goodness of my Redeemer! Far is He from rejecting or punishing the monster of iniquity who approaches Him with marks of friendship. On the contrary, He receives him with indulgence, reminds him of his atrocious act, and calmly says to him: “Friend, for what purpose hast thou come?” And again: “Judas, is it with a kiss thou betrayest the Son of Man?” All the thunders of heaven could not have been more terrible than these words in their marvellous sweetness. Any heart but that of Judas would have been softened, confounded, penetrated. If the demon had not held absolute dominion over him, he would have fallen at the feet of that Master who responded to such black ingratitude with such exceeding goodness. Let us pause for a moment to consider the excess of perfidy on the one hand, and

\* Isaiah xi. 4.

the excess of mercy on the other. See Christ and Judas embrace each other!—Judas to destroy Christ, and Christ to move and save Judas.

But, alas! this soul is absolutely impenetrable to any sentiment of repentance. Will he never acknowledge the infamous crime with which he blackens his soul? He is not far from it. The moment he will see the evil of his treason, that moment he will detest it and will be devoured by terrible remorse. He will repent, indeed; but his repentance will be the last link in his heavy chain of reprobation.

When, a little while after his crime, this wretched disciple saw its consequences; when he saw his Master dragged from tribunal to tribunal, and finally condemned to death, then all the horror of his perfidious act forcibly presented itself to his mind. All the benefits he had received flash upon his memory; he keenly feels the horror of his treason and the baseness of its circumstances; and he is astounded at the thought that he *could* have become such a criminal. He is deeply moved with sorrow—with a sorrow, indeed, that he could not bear. It was real sorrow: “He avowed with tears that he had sinned by betraying innocent

blood.” It was efficacious, too; rarely is our sorrow such. He brought the money, which had been the cause of his treason and its price, to those who had employed him; and when they refused it he would not keep with him the reward of his iniquity, but threw it into the temple.\* What, then, was wanting to his repentance that it might have had merit in the eyes of God? That which is wanting in all sorrow of this description—namely, confidence in God. He could see nothing but his crime; he was blind to the divine mercy. He confessed himself a sinner, but did not think of the goodness of God. He had sorrow, bitter and crushing, but he did not labor to be converted. He turned away in disgust from the money that had corrupted him, but he did not turn towards God. In a word, he did not merit pardon, because he fell into despair. To do penance is to invoke the divine mercy; to despair is to deny it. How, then, can we obtain the divine mercy by insulting it? Penance without hope is the penance of the damned. Like Judas, they weep for their sins; and, like him, they despair of being forgiven. Not the treason of Judas, nor his sac-

\* Matt. xxvii. 3-5.

rilege, was the cause of his reprobation, but his despair. Notwithstanding all his crimes, there remained for him one resource; and with what love Christ had often called him to it! But his despair rendered him impervious to all graces; he rejected the mercy that called him, and, putting the crowning stone upon his tower of iniquity, he became his own executioner. "And he went and hanged himself with a halter." \* But what excited in the heart of Judas such a dreadful horror of his crime? It was the demon that had entered into his soul as soon as he had received the Holy Eucharist. It was this demon that inspired all his sentiments, that formed all his thoughts, that directed all his steps, that had become his master. What! Can it be that the demon himself will be the author of repentance, and will employ for man's destruction that which was intended as the most efficacious and certain means of his salvation? It is even thus he turns to his service means apparently the most contradictory in order to effect our ruin. Before we sin, and in order to engage us in it one of his most ordinary devices is to present to our minds the divine mercy always ready to

\* Matt. xxvii. 5.

pardon us. When we commit the sin, and to bind our souls to its slavery, he casts us down with a view of the horror of divine vengeance, and suggests to us what he put into the heart of the first man that shed blood on earth : "My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon."\* Thus does the father of lies make us pass successively from presumption to despair, exaggerating in our eyes at one time the effects of God's mercy, and again those of His justice ; giving us false ideas of both, according as they will serve his purpose. To the wiles of the wicked one let us constantly oppose contrary sentiments. If we consider ourselves in the way of justice, let us never lose sight of the infinite goodness of God, which we have felt so often ; and at the same time let us cultivate a salutary fear of His justice, so as not to fall into a spirit of dangerous presumption. If there be question of sin, let us also contemplate the divine justice, but tempered with infinite mercy which never ceases to desire our conversion, which calls us back from our wayward course by exhortations and by grace, and which ever receives us with open arms. Great sinners

\* Genesis iv. 13.



though we be, God's mercy is greater still. To think that He is unable or unwilling to pardon us is a new offence, greater than all the rest. It would seal our reprobation, and render all our other sins hopelessly unpardonable.

In considering the frightful fall of Judas let us not forget the conduct of the Jewish priests, whose agent and instrument he was; surely it was scarcely less criminal. He felt at least the pangs of remorse; but their hearts were like marble. They saw the unhappy man, with tears in his eyes, despair depicted on his countenance, accusing himself of having betrayed innocent blood, and bringing back the money with which they had seduced him. What more certain witness of the innocence of Jesus Christ? His enemy, a man who had betrayed Him, now declares Him just and proves *himself* to be the criminal. But nothing can change them; no evidence of truth can shake their wicked purpose. Terrible example of the hardness which resists divine grace! These blind and stubborn men were steeled against the miracles with which our Lord had filled His life for three years. So many wonders, so many traits of virtue, so many benefits, instead of moving them to conver-

sion, only increased their malice. They were insensible to all, and, by a just punishment of their voluntary blindness, they were delivered up to hardness of heart. Their conduct brings to our minds two things apparently opposite, but which are often confounded in the character of some men. These are a profound indifference in regard to great crimes, and a scrupulous exactness regarding matters of small moment. When Judas came to speak to them about the awful crime of which he had been guilty, they answered briefly, saying: "What is this to us? look you to it." But when he placed the money, the wages of his crime, in the common treasury, they declared that it was not lawful to put it there, for it was the price of blood.\* How absurd! They could take it from the treasury when it is to pay for blood, but they could not put it back into the treasury when an attempt is made at restitution! They do not fear to commit an enormous crime, but they fear to infringe upon a legal observance. Men of this kind may still be found in the world—men who "strain at a gnat and swallow a camel."†

It is an important fact in the glorious career of our Lord that the sorrow of Judas should be

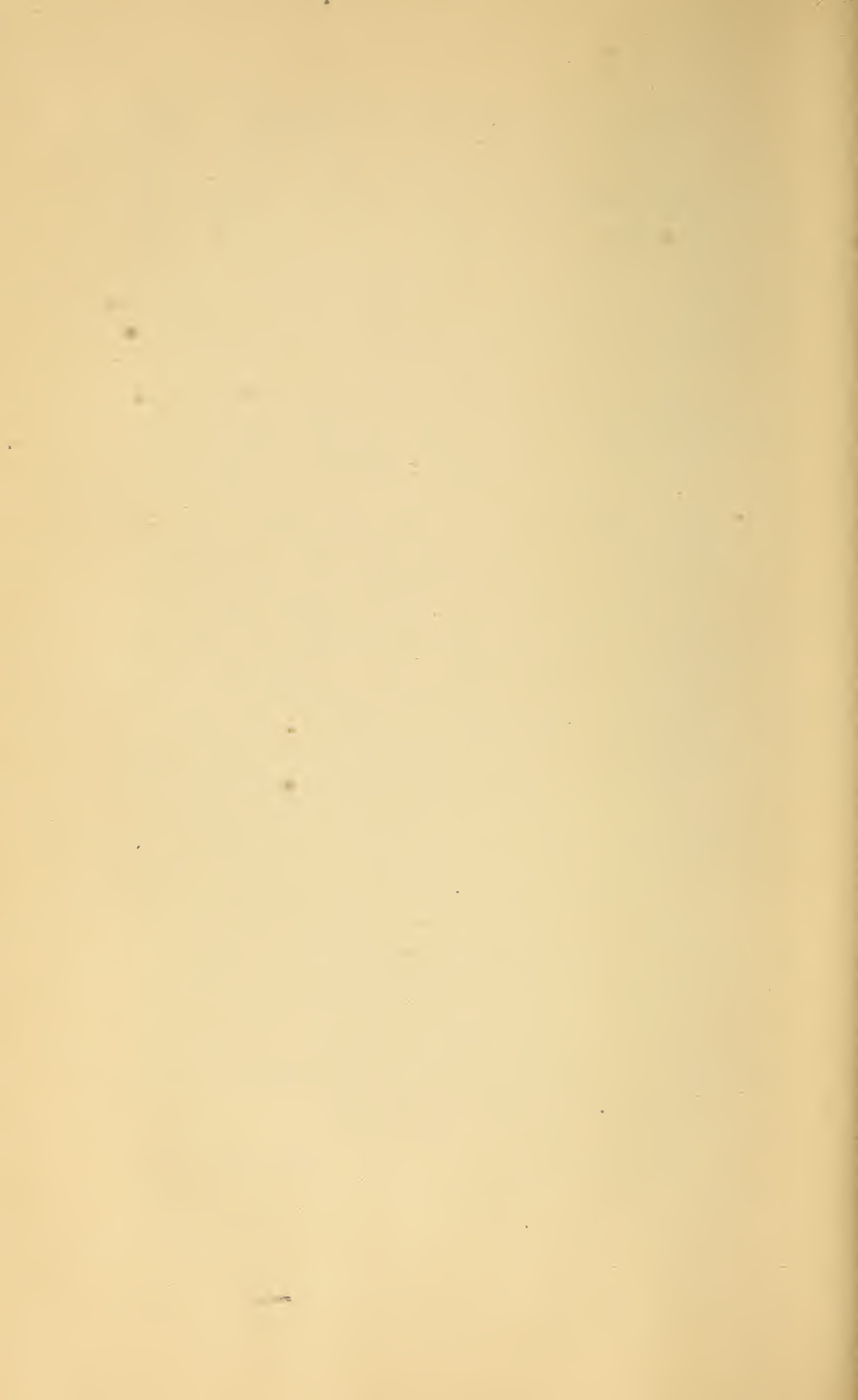
\* Matt. xxvii. 6.

† Ibid. xxiii. 24.

public and authentic. His enemies themselves bring it about. With the money which they would not restore to the treasury they bought the field destined for the burial of strangers; and it was so universally known to be the particular ground purchased with the money that Judas brought back to the priests that it was called "the field of blood." \* Thus this field becomes a monument of the innocence of our Saviour, and is connected, as the Evangelist tells us, with a prophecy which had announced the price at which He was to be sold and the use to which the money was to be put.† St. Matthew narrated the event a short time after it had transpired, and he gives the Jews and their rulers, who were interested in contradicting him, the name given by themselves to this field as a proof of the truth of his recital. He also points out to them, even to the smallest particulars, the prophecies relating to the person of the Messiah. Thus the circumstance, which at first sight seems so unimportant, becomes extremely interesting, both for the corroboration of the Gospel history and the confirmation of our faith.

\* Matt. xxvii. 7, 8.

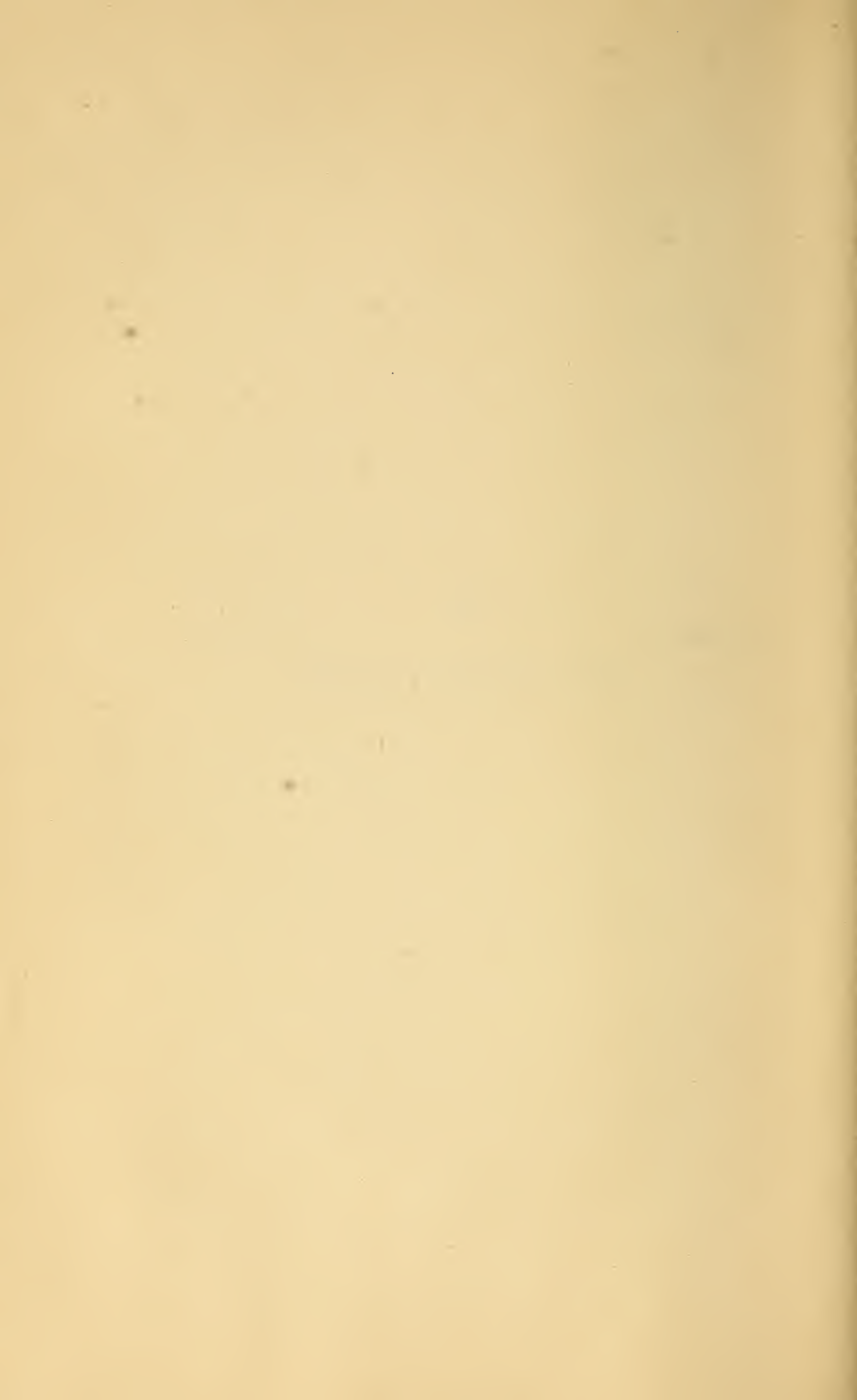
† Ibid. 9, 10.



VI.

*JESUS BEFORE CAIPHAS.*





## VI.

### JESUS BEFORE CAIPHAS.

“The chief priests, therefore, and the Pharisees gathered a council and said: What do we, for this man doeth many miracles? If we let Him alone, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away our place and nation” (John xi. 47, 48).

THE chief men of the Jews now hold in their power the object of their hatred. They drag Him successively before the two great pontiffs—first before Annas, to give him the satisfaction of seeing his victim in their hands, and then to Caiphas, the son-in-law of Annas and the high-priest of that year. Here a council is assembled, consisting of priests, doctors, and ancients. Behold the first tribunal before which our Blessed Saviour is accused, judged, and condemned! But what do I say? When had it been a just tribunal? The men who assumed the part of judges there had long been the declared enemies of Christ. They were the same persons who for three years had never ceased to persecute Him; who always sought occasion to entangle Him in His words, to decry Him with their calumnies, to drive from their

synagogues those who believed in Him. It is in that same council we hear the subterfuges of the members who had seen His miracles and could not deny them: "What shall we do, for this man performs great wonders? If we dismiss Him, all will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away from us our place and nation." It was Caiphas himself, the president of the council, that used the following language: "You know nothing at all. Neither do you consider that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."\* All the barbarity, passion, and iniquity that we are called upon to contemplate in His Passion is concentrated in these grave and learned judges. They had never concealed their hatred of Jesus Christ; their predominant thought was to gratify it.

And these unjust men were the most revered personages in the nation; they were the ancients, the judges of the people, whose calling required them to protect that innocence which they had resolved beforehand to crush. They are doctors of the law and interpreters of the prophecies, whose profound knowledge should

\* John xi. 49, 50.

have brought them to recognize their Messiah ; but they are resolved to destroy Him. They are priests, and the holiness of their profession should have restrained them from all iniquity ; but they give themselves up to it with the most ardent fury. Such became the fatal destiny of men who had dared break through the barriers which their very state of life opposed to sin. Once having broken them, they rushed headlong, even with greater impetuosity than the rest, in their career of crime. Tremble at the sight of them, you especially upon whom more elevated callings have imposed more austere obligations ! Guard against the first and smallest violation of the duties of your state. Be assured that the first fault will engage you in others more disgraceful, until at last they drag you down to your complete ruin. And what rendered the hatred of these members of the Sanhedrim the more abominable and the more dangerous to Christ was the fact that they covered it with the mantle of religion. Hypocrisy, odious to men and to God, adds to the passions which it strives to veil the additional vice of its own baseness. It is the more dangerous to Him, for the hatred of His enemies, how violent soever, would never have been able to accom-

plish such a result if it had not assumed the mask of religion. Such is the nature of envy, which, according to the Wise Man, first brought death into the world.\* It is able to disguise itself in its own eyes and in the eyes of others under a thousand forms, and sometimes, unhappily, under the forms of virtue and piety. Men blush at the thought of their being envious, and more so at appearing such; they hide from themselves its real motive by assuming the garb of religious zeal against the object of their vile passion.

These judges desired to give to the condemnation, already pronounced in advance, the coloring of justice. The object of every judicial process is to discover the truth; the object of this was to make truth disappear. The witnesses are not sought to tell the truth, but to accuse Christ at all hazards. But such had been the irreproachable tenor of His life that the most artificial system of lying could not establish any probability of His guilt. The falsity of the accusations was so evident that the judges themselves, prejudiced and incensed against Him as they were, could not find in them any appearance of evil. "For many bore

\* Wisdom ii. 42.



false witness against Him, and their evidence did not agree.”\* Thus also the Psalmist: “Unjust witnesses have risen up against Me; and iniquity hath lied to itself.”† The sacred writers do not give us in detail the accusations made against our Lord; they mention one, however, which appears to have been the greatest: “Two false witnesses appeared after all the rest and swore that Christ had said: ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and in three days to rebuild it.’”‡ This charge was certainly distinct and minute; but it was as false as the rest. The witnesses changed both the letter and the sense of the words spoken by our Lord. He had spoken neither of His power to destroy nor of the temple of God. But He had said: “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*” And St. John tells us that He meant in this expression the temple of His body, and not the temple of Jerusalem.¶ It was the prediction of His death to be followed by His resurrection. Let us here admire the designs of God. He reproaches them with the prophecy at the moment it is about to be fulfilled, and they are the instru-

\* Mark xiv. 56

‡ Matt. xxvi. 60, 61.

† Ps. xxvi. 12.

¶ John ii. 19.

ments in effecting it. Unsuspecting witnesses report the prediction of the event; and they confirm faith in Jesus Christ at the moment they endeavor to destroy it. Witnesses so palpably guilty of calumny deserved only to be punished. No legislation ever existed that did not punish false witnesses; the tribunals of all nations have condemned them. In this proceeding there is no law. Not only are false witnesses not punished, but they are treated with consideration, perhaps bribed. The desire seems to have prevailed with the judges that, the first witnesses having been dismissed with impunity, others might be induced to come forward. To these calumnies our Lord only opposes silence. In vain does the high priest call upon Him to answer, hoping doubtless to draw from His words something against Himself. He still remains silent, and allows the false accusations to destroy themselves. But does not His personal glory and the honor of His ministry require Him to refute them? It is still more glorious in Him to give us a practical example in these most trying circumstances of what He had often taught. Silence is the lesson given us by our Divine Model. He shows us that there are many occasions in which it is advisable for a Chris-

tian to waive the right of defence, to repress the inquietude incident to it, to give a free course to the words of wicked men, and to resign himself confidently to Him "who sees the reins and the heart, who is the defender of the just, the avenger of innocence." This is especially advisable when accusations are so manifestly calumnious that all may see their falsity; for then it is more useful and more dignified to meet them in silence and not by apologies which would, perhaps, render them respectable. Caiphas, seeing that he could get nothing to suit his purpose from the witnesses brought forward, and that their testimonies injured rather than subserved his dark designs, began himself to interrogate our Lord. His first question had reference to His doctrine and to His disciples. The answer of our Saviour is at once simple and prudent, mild and forcible, moderate and demonstrative. It is full of that modest power which had so often filled the people with admiration and his enemies with confusion. He had never concealed His doctrine; it was delivered in public, in the synagogue, in the assemblies of the Jews. "Why askest thou Me? Ask them who have heard what I have spoken to them; they know

what things I have said." \* Thus does He prove His innocence without discussing it. He calls as witnesses not only a few men whom He is said to have deluded, but the public, the whole nation. Behold the testimony He invokes, the guarantee He produces! An answer so measured yet so persuasive ought to have convinced His enemies and gained them; it had the contrary effect. They are irritated at seeing themselves confounded. One of those assisting at the trial, unable to contain his fury when he saw the impossibility of replying to our Lord with truth and reason, exclaimed: "Answerest Thou the high-priest so?"† and followed his question with a blow. A blow! O avenging God! The arms of Jeroboam withered when they were raised against a prophet. Osa was struck dead because he desired to touch the ark with his hand. Osias is covered with a leprosy for having dared put his hand upon the censer at the altar of perfumes. Yet the hand that has dared offer such an outrage to the Lord of the prophets, to Him whom the ark but prefigured, is unpunished! Nothing would have been easier than for our Lord to have taken instant revenge. We are almost in-

\* John xviii. 21.

† Ibid. 22.

duced to say that it would have been easier for Him to have yielded to His justice than to have restrained it. As God, vengeance is His; as man, it does not belong to him. O men of the world, compare your vain sensitiveness on the point of honor with the conduct of your God receiving violence. It was written that "He shall give His cheek to him that striketh Him,"\* and he fulfilled the prophecy. He answers, however, but with invincible patience, representing to this ruffian the injury he had offered, and not with any word of reproach: "If I have spoken ill, give testimony of the evil; but if well, why strikest thou Me?"† Here He stops; He seeks no further reparation. An exemplary punishment would have been in place; but, always resolved to give the example of what He had taught, He abstains from all that might be or appear to be personal vengeance. But if He did not punish the insult it was the duty of the judges to have done so. They were the only persons who had power to inflict punishment. Whatever wrong was inflicted upon Him was connived at; the most shameful treatment was not only dissembled but authorized; and the license now al-

\* Lamentations iii. 30.

† John xviii. 23.



lowed opened the way for still greater outrages.

The first question of the high-priest had not the desired effect ; now he asks another in the most solemn manner : “ I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us if Thou be the Christ the Son of God.” \* His intention in this question is to disconcert our Lord in His answer and thereby to turn it against Him. Will He deny that He is the Messiah ? If so He will be condemned for having arrogated to Himself that title. Will He confess that He is the Messiah ? If so they will condemn Him for having actually usurped the title. Our Lord clearly saw the snare that was laid for Him, but He would not deny the truth which He had come to proclaim to the world. Besides, He wished to teach us by His example the obligation of confessing our faith even at the peril of life itself. He now boldly declares His divine ministry ; He attests the truth of His doctrine. He answers—although it cannot be hidden from Him that this may bring about His death—He answers because of His reverence for the name of God, by which He is challenged ; because of the authority represented by him who interro-

\* Matt. xxvi. 63.

gates Him; and because of the great truth which He came to manifest. His reply is brief, firm, and dignified. He begins by declaring positively that He is the Son of God, the Messiah. He grandly announces to the high-priest and to those who sit in judgment with him that the day will come when they will see Him "sitting at the right hand of God and coming in the clouds of heaven." \* Thus, in the hands of His barbarous persecutors, He still preserves His dignity; and, penetrating the outrages heaped upon His humanity, the bright light of His divinity appears. This response was what the high-priest anxiously awaited. In a paroxysm of anger, real or affected, he tears his vestments and cries out: "He hath blasphemed; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy. What think you? But they answering, said: He is guilty of death." † In this council, otherwise the most venerable in the world, not one voice is raised in favor of the innocent. Whether we consider the judgment rendered against our Lord in its form or in its substance, it will appear inexplicable. The same man is at once accuser, witness, and judge;

\* Matt. xxvi. 64.

† Ibid. 65, 66.

and it is he who, some time before, had said that Jesus Christ should die. He receives advice, not successively from each judge, but tumultuously from the whole assembly. It is a general cry, not a deliberate decision; a conspiracy, not a decree; a proscription, and not a condemnation. He is judged worthy of death because He declared that He was the Messiah. But being asked, it was necessary for Him to answer. If He were not the Messiah, why put to Him the question and make Him answer in the name of God? If there were doubts on the subject, was it not necessary first to clear them away? Before condemning a man for having arrogated to himself a certain qualification, good sense and natural equity require that an investigation be made as to whether that qualification belonged to him. The miracles of His public life, which, we may justly say, almost marked His every step, were at least a sufficient reason not to omit so essential an examination. But they did not wish to risk it, lest the truth might appear. The pontiff declares that, by the very avowal of the accused, He is guilty of death. But he presses the question, and gives Him not a moment to answer those who had sworn against Him. Does Caiphas

think the first witnesses sufficient? Why, then, does he desire the testimony of Christ Himself? Does he believe their words? Why, then, is there need of any other? In this procedure there is nothing but contradiction, iniquity, and violence; the witnesses are evidently bribed, and they are heard with complaisance. The judges do not conceal their hatred of the accused, and they blush not to bring about His destruction by means the most unjust. If Christ is silent, His silence convicts Him; if He replies, His words convict Him. Questioned as to His doctrine, His answer is met by a blow; questioned as to His person, His confession of the truth brings on Him the charge of blasphemy. He is judged without a process; He is condemned without a fault.

The holy Fathers draw our attention to a remarkable circumstance in regard to the high-priest. In his anger he tore his robes. It was conduct little suitable to the character of a judge or of a priest; it gave evidence of the furious passion by which he was carried away. But in the designs of Providence it has a deeper sense; it contains a mystery which he did not recognize. In tearing the ornaments of his

priestly office he prophesied, without knowing it, the downfall of his priesthood. At that moment the priesthood which had come down from Aaron to Caiphas was abolished. In a few hours it will have no existence before God ; in a few years it will have no existence among men. Jesus Christ is the last victim of theirs that God will recognize ; the sacrifice of the cross will be the last sacrifice of the Old Law and the first of the New. The day will not pass until the veil of the temple shall have been rent to show that God withdraws Himself and rejects the incense there burned, the vows there formed, and all that may there be offered until the hour of its approaching ruin. This hour had come. It was foretold by the prophet Malachy in these words : "I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will not receive a gift from your hands. For from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, My name is great among the gentiles ; and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a clean oblation." \*

Our Lord is condemned to death by the Sanhedrim, but the manner of His death is not designated. His enemies could have stoned Him

\* Malachy i. 10.



to death, as they afterwards did St. Stephen ; but they desired to subject Him to the most infamous of all punishments—the death of the cross. Their intention was to cover him with as much disgrace as possible ; but, contrary to their intentions, it was according to the designs of Providence, in order to fulfil the oracles which our Lord had so often renewed. But they possessed no authority to inflict this kind of punishment. Their law did not suppose the death of the cross and did not permit them to order it. To deliver our Lord to this death it was necessary that He should be condemned by the Roman magistrate. It was resolved, therefore, to bring Him before Pilate, then governor of Judea, as a criminal already pronounced worthy of death. But before executing this design a refinement of cruelty induced them to invent for Him a new species of punishment. Universal consent has established the maxim that every wretched person is to be looked upon as sacred. Not one of his nation, even though culpable and condemned, fails to inspire pity. Justice inclines to soften the penalty of the law in his regard and to save him from all other torments. Here, on the contrary, every sentiment of humanity seems banished ; and the

lowest degree of justice is no longer to be found in those ferocious men. They deliver their victim into the hands of ruffians and the lowest of the people. Behold your Blessed Saviour in the midst of this barbarous multitude, forced to bear their insolence and insults. They had shown favor to false witnesses and to him who had struck our Lord; and now they join to their natural ferocity a desire of pleasing those upon whom they depend. They deliver Him to the most cruel injuries; "they spit in His face, they blindfold Him, they give Him blows and cry out: Prophecy unto us, O Christ, who is it that struck Thee?" \*

In the midst of this frightful treatment our Divine Model does not change. No sign of wrath or even of impatience is discernible upon His countenance. He is tranquil, but not apathetic; dignified without pride; modest without cringing. It seems that no outrages can move Him; and although He feels them most sensibly, He shows neither emotion, nor trouble, nor indignation. And whence this wonderful serenity of our Lord? From three considerations: In the past He hears the prophets announce that He would give His body to those

\* Matt. xxvi. 67, 68.

who would strike Him, and that His face He would not turn away from those who would spit upon Him.\* In the present He sees His Heavenly Father exacting of Him this excess of humiliation in punishment of our pride. In the future He sees the necessity we shall have of so great an example to bear, and even to love, humiliations.

Did I say to love humiliations? Does our religion require this? Yes; without doubt Christianity has that scope. Let us not have an exaggerated idea, however; it does not require of us to have in crosses a pleasure that gratifies the heart, nor even to stifle the natural repugnance that we find in them. If great saints have risen to this high degree of perfection, such miracles of Christian humility go beyond the rule but do not form it. To love humiliations is, notwithstanding the repugnances of the flesh, to esteem ourselves happy in following our Divine Model. It is to prefer the contempt of the world in doing good to its flattery in doing evil. This is the lesson given us in the lives of all the saints. How many occasions present themselves to us in our daily lives that expose us to ridicule, sarcasm, insult, and calumny! And how can we

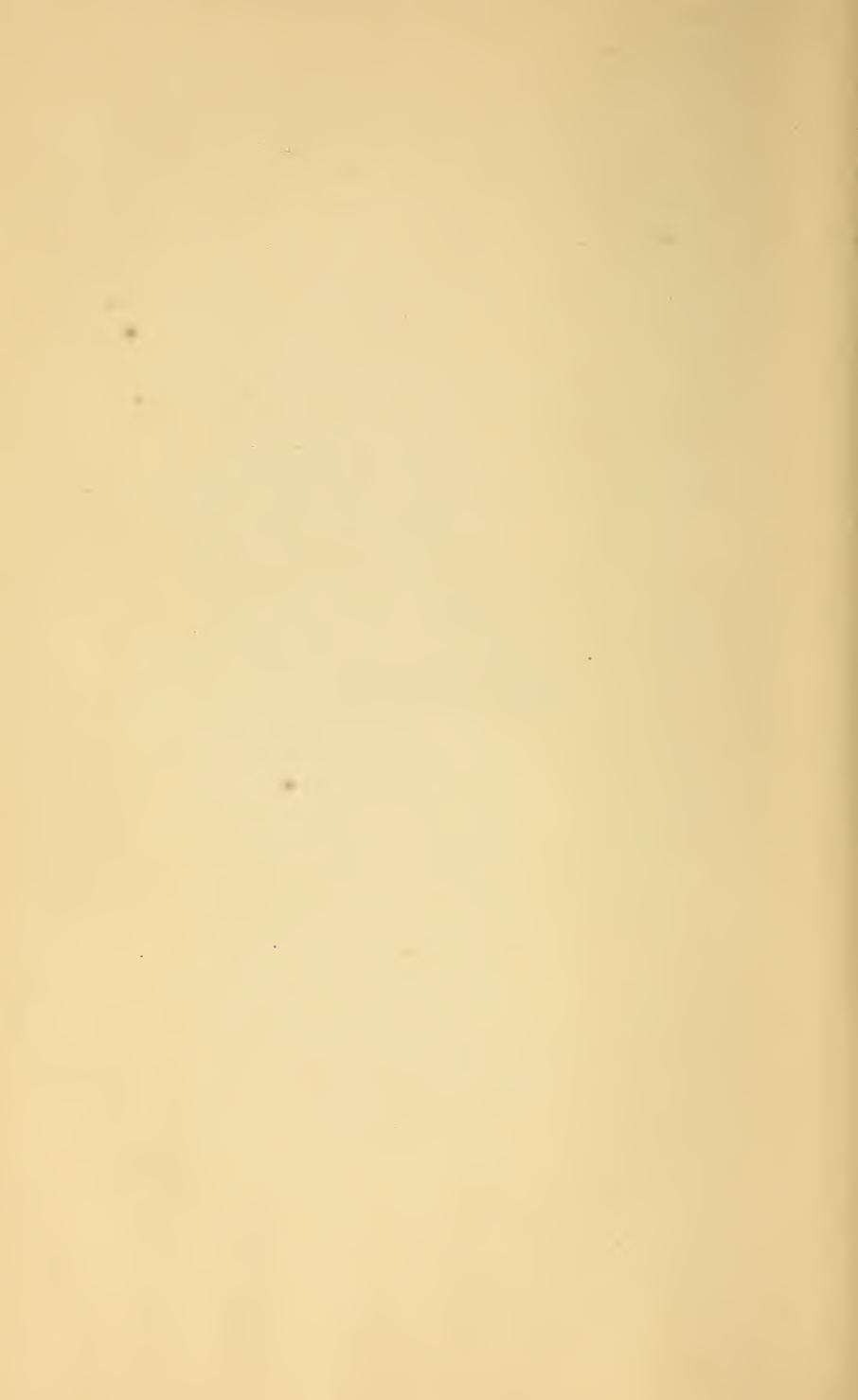
\* *Isaias* 1. 6.

fulfil our obligations to our suffering Saviour, if we have an aversion for these occasions of humiliation? True, it is only religion that can inspire us with a disposition so holy and so contrary to natural inclination. But in giving us the precept our Lord also presents us motives enabling us to fulfil it. These are His example here and the future glory promised to those who bear the cross.

VII.

*PETER'S DENIAL.*





## VII.

### PETER'S DENIAL.

“And the Lord said : Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not ; and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren.” (Luke xxii. 31, 32.)

HERE is another cause of affliction to Christ, but a source of instruction for us. That Apostle whom our Lord especially distinguished ; who was appointed chief among the others ; who was destined one day, along with the primacy of jurisdiction and honor among his colleagues, to obtain the title of sovereign pastor of all the faithful ; who on all occasions had shown the greatest zeal for his Master—he it is who, in the hour when that Divine Master had most need of his attachment and consolation, not only abandons Him in fear, but perfidiously denies Him and protests that he never knew the Man. Is the corner-stone of the Church torn up ? Are the gates of hell to prevail against the foundations of the building ? Oh ! Providence of God ! What will become of the superstructure ? What will become of the oracle by which its stability

was assured? Let us not lose courage: Peter falls, but it is to rise again without delay and stronger than ever. He sins to show us the weakness of our nature; but he rises again to show us the effect of true Christian penance.

At the Last Supper our Lord said to Peter that Satan had sought him to sift him as wheat; "but I have prayed for *thee*," he added, "that *thy* faith fail not; and *thou*, once converted, confirm *thy* brethren." Thus, long before, Satan had asked and obtained the power of tormenting holy Job; and so also now he asks that the Apostles of the Lord should be abandoned to him that he might persecute them—or sift them as wheat. The enemy of our salvation can do nothing against us but as God, in His wisdom, permits. He allows him a time and a place in which to try His true disciples, and withholds him at His pleasure. Jesus Christ suffers now; the time of the Apostles is not yet come. He foretells their sufferings; but it is necessary that His sorrows should anticipate theirs, and that He should first drink the bitter chalice to its dregs. Not until they shall have been taught to suffer martyrdom by His example will they be called to it. Not until they shall have preached His Gospel to the world will they be required to die

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for it. Then indeed the wheat shall be sifted, the chaff of human weakness cast away, and the purity of a holy life presented to God. St. Peter, in the text quoted, is the object of a special prayer. Our Lord asks and obtains for him an indefectible faith, and that after his conversion he should confirm his brethren. This prayer of our Lord will extend through all ages ; it comes down to us ; and will be continued in the world as long as Christianity itself. The faith of Peter, preserved in his successors, has never failed, and never will fail. The chair of Peter, more firmly fixed than the rock of the Capitol upon which it is placed, will never be lost to the Church. Notwithstanding the efforts of God's enemies, it will subsist as long as the world ; notwithstanding errors, heresies, and schisms, it will ever remain ; it will ever offer to mankind the true and entire doctrine received from Jesus Christ. If, in some few circumstances, the sun which sheds the rays of divine faith upon the earth appears clouded, it is only so for the purpose of afterwards coming forth in greater brilliancy, to scatter mists that had obscured its fair face. Peter, *converted*, confirms his brethren, and calls back to the truth, by instruction and authority, those

who had wandered from the unity of faith. Touched with the word of his Divine Master, whom he cherished and revered, and somewhat moved at the thought that he would ever stand in need of conversion, Peter at once declared that he would follow Him everywhere and always—even to prison and to death. The ardent sentiment of the Apostle seems only to merit our praises, and yet it is deficient in a very essential point. The feeling which then animated him he supposed would be perpetual ; he did not think that his love of Christ would ever diminish or change. But he counted upon himself, and not on the grace of Heaven ; on the power of his tender love, and not on the goodness of God. He had never had experience of his weakness ; he knew not, or perhaps did not reflect, that man, abandoned to himself and destitute of divine succor, is powerless for good. Christian confidence means trust in God and diffidence in ourselves. He has promised us all that is good for us ; we may well confide in Him. We are weak and inclined to evil ; we must distrust ourselves. Holy David could well despise his enemies ; but this was because God was on his side. Peter defied his enemies, trusting in himself, and hence he fell. The holy Fathers tell us that this was,



indeed, the first cause of his sin. Let us apply this awful lesson to ourselves. An Apostle, the very Prince of the Apostles, shamefully falls by presumption! If in this we follow him, what will become of us? Let us promise our Lord to follow Him to prison and to death, if He so wills it; but let all our resolutions be founded on His divine grace, which alone can render them efficacious. Let us be penetrated with two special considerations: first, that experience constantly proves to us that without God's grace we can do nothing; and, secondly, that with it, as we know from God's own word, we can do all things. The first guards us against presumption; the second against cowardice. The thought of our weakness will always keep us on the alert, so that we may be saved in the sudden attacks of our enemy; the assurance of divine grace will give us strength and courage to conquer when attacked.

Our Blessed Lord, to repress the temerity of His Apostle, predicts his fall. "And Jesus saith to him: Amen I say to thee, to-day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice. But he spoke the more vehemently: Although I should die together with Thee, I will not deny Thee. And in like manner

also said they all.” \* Here is a singular controversy indeed between our Saviour and the chief of His Apostles. We know the event. St. Peter was indeed soon to deny his Master ; but he was very far from believing it possible that he could commit such a crime. But our Lord knew better than he his interior dispositions and the instability of his resolutions. Alas ! is it not thus with me ? The Master of life knows me much better than I know myself. He sees at the depth of my heart what is hidden from me. How often, like St. Peter, have I been deceived in regard to my sentiments—their principle, their nature, their tendency, and their stability ! How often have I been deluded with respect to my conscience—sometimes without my willing it, and sometimes, too, with a will not entirely determined. Give me, O God, the grace clearly to see my weakness ; take the veil of self-love from before my eyes, that they may penetrate the most hidden recesses of my soul and discover to me my vicious inclinations and dangerous dispositions. “Know thyself” was a maxim of one of the greatest of the ancient philosophers ; his reason revealed to him this fundamental principle of all morality. But reason cannot give us the conviction that it

\* Mark xiv. 30, 31.

is from God alone this essential knowledge is to come. This we learn from the science acquired at the foot of the cross.

Yet Peter sustained in the Garden of Olives the boldness of which he had made profession at the Last Supper. When the emissaries of the Sanhedrim came to arrest his Master he put himself in an attitude of defence; alone, before an armed troop, he drew the sword; and, without regard to consequences, he struck and wounded Malchus. No doubt he erred in this act; in his conduct there was an indiscreet zeal, a dangerous haste. Yet do I still recognize Peter in all this. I see in it the ardor which always moves him when there is question of the interests or the honor of his Blessed Saviour. I also observe that when his Master is arrested and dragged before the judges, Peter is there. True, he follows at a distance; but this does not appear to his dishonor, especially after his Master had forbidden defensive measures and had ordered the disciples to go away. But, alas! soon no one can recognize him. In a few moments he will be no longer that Apostle, so faithful and so zealous, who promised his Lord to follow Him to prison and to death; who defended Him at the peril of life; who, when he saw that dear Lord

led away captive, still would not abandon Him. What, then, has brought about this inconceivable weakness, this unhappy change? In going to the house of Caiphas at all Peter made a false step; he thereby threw himself among those who had seized our Lord. It was an imprudent exposure of himself to be recognized as a follower of Christ when it was to no useful purpose. This was one cause of his fall. True it is that God promises not to permit us to be tempted beyond our strength;\* but He does not promise this to the rash and careless who throw themselves in the way of danger. He promises it to those who merit this grace by their watchfulness. Thus we hear Him say: "He that loveth danger shall perish in it."† He is not bound to save the man who thus exposes himself. And how many of our faults have been committed not only because we did not fly from danger, but because we even sought it? Have we not sufficient temptations that we cannot avoid, with all manner of precaution? Why, then, should we throw ourselves in the way of others and thus provoke the enemy whom, at best, we can hardly conquer? This first step in the direction of sin is the first advantage given to

\* 1 Cor. x. 13.

† Eccclus. iii. 27.

the enemy, and prepares for him a more certain triumph. We shall have much less power to resist him when we are involved in the snare that is laid for us. This is what the fall of Peter teaches. He is drawn into temptation and falls. And what an awful fall was his! It is even Peter that denies Christ! And he does it not by a surprise or a sudden motion of the spirit that gives him no time to deliberate; he denies his Master three times, and before different persons; and there is the interval of an hour between two of his denials.\* Nor is it the terror which might have been inspired by the presence of powerful persons that causes his fall; it is the question of a servant-maid, the remarks of certain menials as to his accent and place of birth, that make him weak, ungrateful, a liar, a perjurer, an apostate. With an oath he swears that *he never knew the Man*. Alas! it is to this MAN he has been attached for three years without ever leaving Him; it is by this MAN he has been raised to the dignity of the apostolate, and even to its first rank; this is the MAN who made him walk upon the waters, whose power he had often witnessed, whose glory he had beheld on Thabor! How many crimes are here found in one!

\* Luke xxii. 59.



We are astonished, afflicted, indignant to see one loaded with so many favors, so foully deny Him from whom they are all received; but we reflect not upon the great number of times we have fallen into his sin. How often, as St. Paul says, we pretend to confess Christ by our words and deny Him by our actions! \* All who oppose the examples and maxims of Jesus Christ, and give the preference to those of the world, deny Him. Those who hear discourses against Him with silence, or with some degree of approbation, deny Him. Those who act irreverently before the altar in which He resides, deny Him. Those who receive Him unworthily deny Him as effectually as St. Peter, for they know Him as well. They receive the same abundance of His graces, and yet they renounce Him, not once, but frequently, habitually, continually. Let all who thus deny Him hear His divine oracle: "Whosoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in Heaven." † Let them imitate the penance of St. Peter, if they would escape the threatened punishment.

One of the most frequent causes of the denial of Christ in the world is that same human respect which operated so disastrously in the case

\* Ep. to Titus i. 16.

† Matt. x. 33.

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of Peter. We often meet persons who, in their love of our Lord, brave all manner of persecutions and suffer death itself, and yet have not the courage to denounce the vain discourses which corrupt the world. The courage which defies death and that which despises raillery are of a different kind ; and the latter is probably less common, though more necessary, than the former. Occasions to confess the name and love of God to the point of dying for them do not often occur. Occasions to bear contempt and scorn for Him are most common. How many there are who have no disgust for evil and who blush at doing good ! How often have I, through fear of being considered by worldlings as weak-minded, scrupulous, or excessively religious, stifled the inspirations of grace and the voice of conscience ! How often, to please the world, have I conformed to its language which I otherwise despised ; applauded its maxims which I detested ; and imitated its example which I condemned ! What scandalous and criminal weakness ! Why is this ? It is to obtain the applause or to avoid the blame of those who merit only contempt. Their approbation is preferred to that of men whom we esteem in the depths of our hearts, and even to that of God Himself ; so that the

levity of libertines is of more weight than the terrible judgment of the Almighty. Let us free ourselves from a slavery so unreasonable, so humiliating, so ruinous. Let us dare be Christians, for if we are not such openly we are not such at all. Let us dare be Christians, and even the world, excepting a few of its most abandoned votaries, will entertain for us greater respect. Yes, the world, how perverse soever its maxims may be, still reveres, and always will revere, those who openly and nobly follow the maxims of Christ ; and even against its opposition to religion, it will pass an honorable judgment upon all who make the observance of the precepts of faith a life-long duty.

The fall of Peter was great indeed ; but he soon rose again. He heard the crowing of the cock ; he met one glance of His Saviour. Both brought to his mind the prediction he had heard. He began to feel his condition and to detest his sin. A convert almost as soon as he had become a sinner, he at once begins to weep for his crime and to merit pardon. Let us contemplate the repentance of the Apostle ; and as we have often sinned like him, let us also imitate him in our repentance. The first idea with him is the word of Jesus Christ : “And Peter remembered the

word of the Lord, how He had said : Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice." \* In like manner it is by remembering the word of the Lord that the sinner begins to see his state and to be moved to repentance. The first cause of the fall of Peter was his having lost sight of the precepts, promises, and menaces of Jesus Christ. He neglected to consider the blessed word of truth seriously, but drove it from his mind as an importunate thought. To rise from his fallen state he was obliged to use the contrary means : to impress deeply upon his mind the words of his Saviour, those efficacious words by which sinners are converted, by which His anger is announced, by which pardon is offered to all who seek it with a good heart. It was the remembrance of the word of Jesus Christ that made Peter clearly see and detest his sin. The meditation, study, and constant thought of the same blessed word will open the eyes of sinners and draw from them a flood of tears.

As soon as our Apostle saw his fault he at once departed from the place which had been the sad theatre of his misfortune. Sinners, you who are agitated by remorse, who recognize the misery of your state and cannot muster up the courage

\* Luke xxii. 61.

to quit it, who feel at once the desire and the impossibility of rising from your deplorable condition, begin, in God's name, by cutting off everything that is an occasion of sin to you. Break the vicious habits which chain you down, — the criminal attachments which hold you in their embrace. Leave the evil associations whose maxims and example push you on to your ruin. Free yourself from the spirit of a wicked world which is a continual scandal to you. Separated from objects the presence of which constantly draws you into sin, you will more easily rise from sin. The first step will lead to other and longer ones; and the beginning of the sacrifice will bring with it the graces necessary to finish it.

Finally, Peter, touched with a lively sorrow, shed bitter tears. Sorrow on earth, joy in Heaven! His sin is no sooner known than wept for; no sooner wept for than pardoned. Oh! ineffable goodness of God! Let repentance be once commenced in the true spirit, and pardon is assured. Not only does Peter obtain grace, but he is immediately re-established in all his rights as Prince of the Apostles and head of the Church. Thus it is that the sentence which reconciles us with God not only delivers us from our sins, but restores to us all that was lost and



revives in us all the merits and spiritual gifts of which we had been deprived. Let us deeply reflect upon the penance of the Apostle, that we may conform ours to it. Let it be as prompt as was his, so that as soon as we find ourselves charged with the guilt of sin we may make haste to be delivered from it, having a salutary fear lest its weight drag us into other and greater sins. Let our repentance be as sincere and lively as was his. True repentance is not superficial ; it must penetrate the heart. How often do the tears shed on account of sin remain sterile because they come from a light and passing sensibility ! Finally, let it be constant, as was Peter's ; he spent his whole after-life in bewailing his fault. True, our Lord had buried it in oblivion ; but his continual sorrow was a great help to guard him against other falls. As for us, how do we satisfy for the sins that have been forgiven ? In place of repairing the injury done, do we not frequently fall back into our former habits ? We pretend to be penitent, and we are scarcely converted.

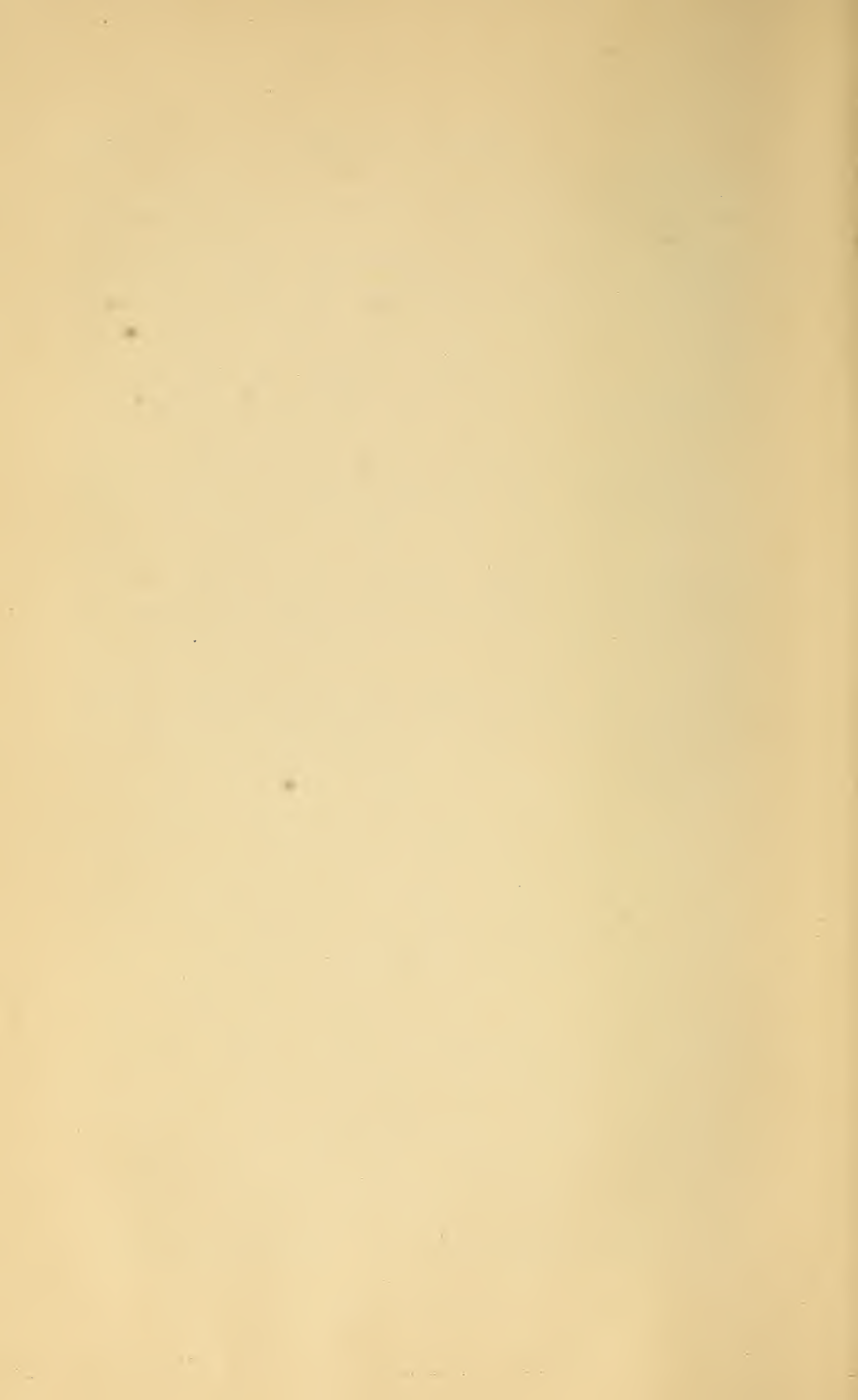
Let us not forget the glance of our Lord at Peter which converted him. Amid the outrages heaped upon Him in the court of Caiphas, His compassionate goodness could not but show an

interest in His unhappy Apostle. Let us ask Him, in like manner, to cast one loving glance upon us, so as to change our hearts. The penance which draws God's mercy upon it is also a part of that mercy.

In the history of the Passion we find two of the disciples grievously culpable—one betrays His Master, the other denies Him. Both repented with deepest sorrow. Yet what a difference there was between them! Judas is sorrowful, but despairs of forgiveness; Peter is sorrowful, but has confidence in God. Judas fixes his eyes upon the earth and revolves in his mind a desperate project. Peter fixes his eyes on Heaven and receives consolation. Judas cannot bear the weight of his sin, and falls under it; Peter is humbled, confounded, but not cast down; he fears, but does not despair. Judas falls beneath a load of shame, and commits suicide; Peter resolutely withdraws from sin and its surroundings, and commences a career of glorious apostleship. Judas dies a reprobate; Peter, after having lived as head of the Universal Church, Prince of the Apostles, and representative of Christ, dies a martyr. Such is true and false penance—one giving a holy confidence, the other leading to despair. The different sorrows of the

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two Apostles present to us still another consideration. Both had committed great offences against Christ, and both felt the most profound grief. Therefore they were both convinced of the virtue, the innocence of Him with whom they had lived three years. No one can suspect their testimony in favor of Christ. Incredulity wishes to stigmatize the Apostles as impostors; what will it call these two? What could have produced such violent remorse but a full conviction? Let the incredulous explain otherwise, if they can, the death of Judas and the tears of Peter. Let them name the motives that could have induced them so to weep for, so to punish their sin.



VIII.

*JESUS BEFORE PILATE.*





## VIII.

### JESUS BEFORE PILATE.

“And the whole council bound Jesus, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate.” (Mark xv. 1.)

THE night ended amid the shocking outrages to which Jesus had been subjected ; and the sun rose to shine upon the greatest crime ever committed on earth. Did I say “shine” ? Ah ! no ; that word must be corrected ; for when the crime came to a climax and Christ was indeed lifted on the cross, an eclipse veiled the face of the sun. The pontiffs, the ancients, the doctors, and the whole Sanhedrim consult together. In condemning Jesus to death in their own tribunal they had shown their hatred of Him. Now, to give it more effect, they resolve to make His death as disgraceful and cruel as possible. To this end, having bound Him again, they bring Him before Pilate, the Roman governor. Behold your Lord and Master dragged through the streets as a criminal, harassed by a vile crowd of attendants and ruffians who had come on purpose to insult

Him ; yes, and by a still more wicked crowd of judges who had come down from their tribunals to act before Pilate the disgraceful part of witnesses and accusers ! It is easy to imagine their conduct on the way to his court.

Their first act in coming before Pilate is remarkable. It furnishes a striking example of all professions of religion that are not founded on true principles. They hesitate not a moment to accuse an innocent man with a view to His destruction ; but they will not enter Pilate's house, lest they should thereby contract a legal uncleanness and become disqualified to take part in the paschal solemnity.\* They make no scruple of committing an atrocious murder, but they shrink from a light breach of a law merely ceremonial. Among Christians of this our day do we not find some who make their whole religious obligation consist in certain minute observances of piety and seriously violate the divine precepts ? Do we not find persons who would not fail in their pet devotions for any consideration, and yet without much difficulty break the most important laws ? These pretend to a high degree of sanctity on the strength of certain devotions of mere rou-

\* To go into the house of a Pagan was uncleanness to Jews.

tine ; whereas, in weighty matters, they are not Christians at all.

Pilate, by a condescension very commendable in him and to humor the scruples of the Jews, goes out to meet them. His questions are reasonable and just : “ What accusations do you bring against this man ? ” It was difficult indeed to find an accusation against the Saint of saints. The Jews had expected His condemnation on their mere word, and that Pilate would never have required specific proofs of the guilt of Jesus. Hence they answer the inquiry of the moderate and sensible governor with anger and insolence, as if it were an insult to question their words, even when the life or death of a human being was in the balance. “ If He were not a malefactor,” say they, “ would we have brought Him before you ? ” In this style of speech we can easily detect a common practice existing even now. We hear men make vague and indefinite accusations against their neighbors ; and they expect us to take them at their word. They affect, indeed, to be offended if they are in the least doubted ; and, while they cruelly decry the honor of another, bitterly complain of their own honor being attacked because, forsooth, their words

of vile defamation are not blindly received. The very answer of the Jews might have been taken as a proof that they were unable to bring forward any well-founded charge against Christ. Pilate might even then have concluded that he was innocent, and that envy and hatred were the sole cause of His arrest. Unwilling to disoblige the Jews, and still more so to commit an act of injustice to please them, he tells them that they have a law, and that by it they should judge Him. But this was not to their liking. It failed also to satisfy the rage of hearts that could only be appeased by the most inhuman punishment. Therefore they answered that, until the close of the ceremonies then in progress, they had no power to put any one to death. Their impatience to sacrifice an innocent Victim could bear no delay. But their blind violence drew them unconsciously to carry out the will of that very Victim; for their exertions only tended to bring Him to the precise form of execution which He had foretold.

Forced at length to make known the alleged misdeeds of our Blessed Saviour, they reduce them to three specific heads: "That He was guilty of sedition; that He had forbidden the



tribute to be paid to Cæsar ; and that He had made Himself out Christ and King." Behold in these charges the consummate cunning and malice of His accusers. Before Caiphas, in the Jewish court, He is charged with crimes against the Jewish religion—with having threatened to destroy the temple ; with having declared Himself the Son of God ; and with other so-called blasphemies. Before Pilate, to whom the law and religion of the Jews were of small concern, these accusations are not heard at all. Pilate represents the Emperor of Rome, and he is bound to uphold Roman authority. Wherefore it is necessary to accuse Christ before *him* of conduct calculated to subvert that authority. In the council of the Jewish priests He is set forth as an impious man ; in the court of Pilate He is held up as a rebel. Thus does their insidious malevolence assume various forms, according to the position, the interests, the prejudices, or the passions of the person whose favor they seek. In each court the accusations best adapted to make an impression against Him are especially urged. Such cruel meanness is not so rare as may be imagined in our times, and many instances of its vile power may easily be adduced.

But if the allegations of the Sanhedrim were formed with sufficient adroitness to arrest the attention of the Roman governor, they were too clumsily constructed to deceive him. They were vague and presented to the mind of the magistrate only general faults. It was not sufficient to say that He had excited sedition, or that He had forbidden the payment of the tribute, or that He had affected royalty. To give the least weight to these charges it was necessary to specify the particular class of people thus excited to sedition; what means He had made use of to carry out His purpose; what sedition it was, in fact, that had been suppressed. Again, it was essential to specify where, when, and what persons He had forbidden to pay the tribute. The circumstances of place and time in which He had made Himself out a king were also to be inquired into. Without clear answers to these pertinent questions the accusations were of no value. They were merely vague, undefined charges, totally unfit to be received in any court of justice. Not only had they no foundation in truth, but they were contrary to the truth; for Jesus had taught obedience to all lawful authority and had actually commanded

the tribute to be paid to Cæsar. He had even recommended submission to the scribes and pharisees, who were not only unworthy of it in many respects, but were even His deadly enemies. He had publicly declared that, as they sat upon the chair of Moses, their words were to be received with all docility, although their conduct was grossly reprehensible. Not one of the accusations against Him had any foundation in fact; not one of them rather that was not contradicted by known facts. Nor was Pilate ignorant of this; he clearly saw that the Jews were moved against Jesus by envy and malice alone. Hence he appears to have paid very little attention to their impious demands. But, as it was his duty neither to dismiss nor to convict an accused person before hearing his defence, he went into the prætorium, or outer court, in which the Jews held our Lord a prisoner, to hear Him. Here is the innocent Lamb of God in the hands of His enemies; but observe how easy it is for Him in presence of an unbiassed judge to prove Himself guiltless.

Pilate, reducing all the accusations to one principal head, which, in fact, comprised them all, asked our Lord if He were indeed the King of the Jews. This question may not have

been proposed in the juridical form ; and our Saviour, before answering it, interrogated Pilate : " Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or have others told it thee of Me ? Pilate answered : Am I a Jew ? Thy own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee up to me ; what hast Thou done ? " \* Jesus, knowing all things, well knew the charges made against Him ; but He desired to make the judge himself explain in what quality, with what motives and object, he had entered upon this examination. Inasmuch as He was subject to the authority of Pilate, who was the representative of Roman power, He was disposed to answer all questions proposed. But He would not deign to satisfy mere idle curiosity. In this admirable conduct our Divine Teacher shows us the distinction ever to be made between the questions put to us by those having proper authority, and the questions of those whose sole object is to ascertain our secret thoughts, to turn them against us, or to flatter their own vanity. In the latter case prudence commands silence. Hence it was that, when Pilate declared that it was the Jewish people and priests that accused Him and had forced this inquiry, our Lord at once answered and explained the nature of

\* John xviii. 34, 35.

His mystical kingdom : “ My kingdom is not of this world ; if My kingdom were of this world, My servants would certainly strive that I should not be delivered to the Jews. But now My kingdom is not hence.”\*

All the kingdoms of the earth, their rulers and subjects, great and small, are in the power of God. He alone is the supreme and universal King. Those whom we revere as such here on earth are only the agents and ministers of His authority ; and this is their only title to our respect and obedience. We consider in them the image of the King of Heaven, whose power extends over all nature ; and in this light we revere them. Christ does not claim an earthly kingdom. He gives all to temporal rulers, His representatives. Over these He holds sway by a general providence as well as by secondary causes which He sets in motion. Or, if sometimes, in the designs of His infinite wisdom, which we cannot penetrate, He exercises a more immediate influence, it is but rarely, and in a form quite beyond the reach of our feeble minds. But He possesses in the world a kingdom of another kind which is not of the world, though it extends over all that are in the world.

\* John xviii. 36.



It is a kingdom ever ruling of itself, and ever directed by its Founder and Head. This is indeed His kingdom. The officers of this kingdom are under His own direction ; the laws are dictated by Himself ; and, when their meaning is in doubt, He has provided an infallible interpreter to solve it. The interests, honors, riches of this kingdom are far above all earthly ideas. They have Heaven for their object ; they overstep the limits of time and reach into eternity. We are citizens of this commonwealth ; we are naturalized subjects of this sacred dominion ; we are sworn servants of its King. Once admitted into this kingdom, we become a part of the body politic—enjoy its rights and assume its duties. Baptism forms between us and its Sovereign Master a *social contract*. By it we attain to the liberty of the children of God ; deliverance from the slavery of the devil ; possession of spiritual goods ; and a right to an eternal inheritance. By the same act we at once submit ourselves to the constant observance of the laws, precepts, and maxims of the government of which we become subjects. From that moment, as St. Peter tells us, we are a chosen race, a holy nation, a purchased people ; but on condition that we make manifest in our lives the

virtues of Him who from darkness has brought us into His admirable light. We, who before were not a people, are now God's own.\* Let us deeply consider the privileges conferred upon us by admission into Christ's kingdom, so that the constant thought of them may sustain our expanded hopes and help us perform all our duties more cheerfully.

The kingdom of Christ *is not of this world*. Whence, then, the rivalries and jealousies between it and those of earthly princes? How has opposition between them become possible when they are apparently so completely separated? The ungovernable rage of domination is the cause. Rulers of the earth, you who are even sometimes ambitious to be called its deities, permit us to make known to you not only your duties but your interests also. We boldly and truthfully say to you that you only work out your own destruction when you assume to yourselves a power never intended for you in the Providence of God. We mean a power over spiritual things. In lessening the power of the Church you weaken your own. You imagine you strengthen it; but you sap its foundation. Religion consecrates your power; and respect

\* 1 Peter ii. 9, 10.

for religion is therefore its most solid support. And when you are seen usurping spiritual functions and rendering yourselves oracles of the divine decrees, do you think that men will continue to respect you? In seeing them desert your thrones it ought to occur to you that they can no longer look upon them as the hinges of human happiness. Do not deceive yourselves; all legitimate powers are mutually united and reciprocally sustain one another. In setting the example to withdraw your subjects from the Church you only accustom them to withdraw themselves from your power also. The King of kings has made you rulers of the earth; this is the strongest reason why you should yield a ready allegiance to the kingdom which He has especially established in the world to preserve, propagate, and perpetuate the truth.

It may be that Pilate did not comprehend the expression of Christ as to a kingdom not of this world; but he surely felt that a man making no pretensions to earthly authority could hardly be dangerous to the state. Hence his efforts to save our Lord from death. The goods of Heaven were of small account in Pilate's eyes; and he showed no inclination to be instructed in regard to them. Yet he again asked our Lord if indeed He were a

King. The affirmative answer was accompanied by a declaration that deeply affected the mind of the Roman governor, and gives much matter for our own reflection. "For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice." \* Pilate, satisfied that our Lord was innocent, and not disposed to hear any more about His mission, vaguely asked: "What is truth?" † And not waiting for an answer, he went out again to the Jews. Jesus Christ came upon earth to give to man truth, then almost everywhere unknown. It is only from Him we can receive it. It is He who instructs us by His pastors, to whom He gave the commission to teach. Other masters lead us into error. Falsehood and deceit are the sure mark of infidels, schismatics, heretics, and libertines. Let us fly from them as if they were afflicted with a plague. If we are sincere in our professions of loving the truth let us embrace it. This is the mark of our honesty. How many pretend to seek the truth and yet fear it! Like the Jews in the time of Isaias the prophet, they seem to say: "Behold not for us those things that are right; speak

\* John xviii. 37.

† Ib. 38.

unto us pleasant things.” \* How many there are who, indifferent to truth and error, to good and evil, look upon all doctrine as problematical, and pretend to say with Pilate: “What is truth?” It is not to be instructed that they thus speak; but rather because they make no account of it. The unbelieving magistrate was punished in after-life for not accepting the proffered truth. Christ had entered into the exposition of it for his benefit; but the manifest indifference of Pilate cut short the discourse. Like him, all others who despise the truth will be punished. They will be deprived of it, and darkness and error will take its place.

Returning to the Jews, Pilate said to them: “I find no cause of accusation in Him.” They were sorely disappointed to see the slight effect of their clamors and intrigues, and became more incensed than ever. The chief priests and ancients renew their charges; but our Blessed Lord, ever consistent with Himself, meets them with silence. In the words of the prophecy of old: “He was as a lamb before His shearer, and opened not His mouth.” † In vain does Pilate press Him to answer these accusations. He is silent. And why should He speak? He knew

\* *Isaias xxx. 10.*† *Ib lili. 7.*



that their gross calumnies would destroy themselves ; He knew that they could make no impression on the mind of the judge. To the questions put to Him by proper authority He makes answer ; to those put to Him as a result of hatred He replies not. And Pilate is not mistaken as to the silence of Jesus Christ ; instead of offending him, it excites his admiration. He saw with astonishment that our Lord with one word could have confounded His enemies ; yet He would not speak that word—and this even when His life was at stake. Pilate saw that He quietly received all the attacks made upon Him, grandly supported by the consciousness of His innocence. The pagan governor was forced to admire a silence tranquil but not sad ; meek but not timid ; dignified but not arrogant ; patient but not obstinate. He compared the silence of the accused, whom he knew to be innocent, with the tumultuous cries of His accusers, whose malice was evident—*their* furious importunity with *His* unswerving modesty.

Why, then, does not Pilate declare groundless these calumnious charges and dismiss Christ ? His statement to the Jews that he found no crime in Jesus ought to have been a sentence of release and absolution. It should have placed our Lord

under his protection and have imposed silence upon His enemies. From the beginning Pilate saw the innocence of Christ. His intentions also were good, because he sincerely desired to save Him. Yet he *will* not release Him, but concludes by condemning Him. What is the value of clear-sightedness when we sacrifice it to our interests? What are good intentions when not put into execution? Pilate belonged to that class of men designated by the world as wise and *safe*, if not honest. But they absolutely lack all these qualities. He is a striking example of the fact that outside the pale of true Christianity there is neither wisdom, nor safety, nor honesty. His plan, which, in truth, is not uncommon amongst us, was to reconcile things irreconcilable—that is, to make the interests of God and justice agree with the interests of the devil and injustice. He had, indeed, a desire to follow his conscience, provided his credit and interests with men were safe. He wished to save Christ and not offend the Jews. He had no pleasure in inflicting a grave injury upon an innocent man; but he feared to compromise himself with his master, the Emperor of Rome. He loved what was good, but dared not do it. He hated evil, but had not strength of character

to resist it. Self-interest made him politic; policy made him timid; and timidity made him criminal. "Seek not to be made a judge, unless thou have strength enough to extirpate iniquity,"\* are the words of the Holy Ghost. Magistrates, rulers of men, all you who are charged by Providence with authority over others, contemplate the excess of crime to which weakness may lead you! It was neither ignorance, nor prejudice, nor passion that made Pilate unjust; it was weakness alone that made him sacrifice honor, probity, conscience, God. Of what concern is it to those of whom you have charge, or to your own souls and conscience, whether it is by corruption, weakness, or negligence you do wrong? Indeed, weakness in rulers is more dangerous than actual depravity. It is more dangerous to the public, because it adds to its own fault the faults of others; more dangerous to one's self, because it is more common and its stings are less felt. In praying, therefore, to God for our rulers, let us beseech Him to endow them with the spirit of power and determination to put down evil and sustain the good, no matter what opposition they may meet.

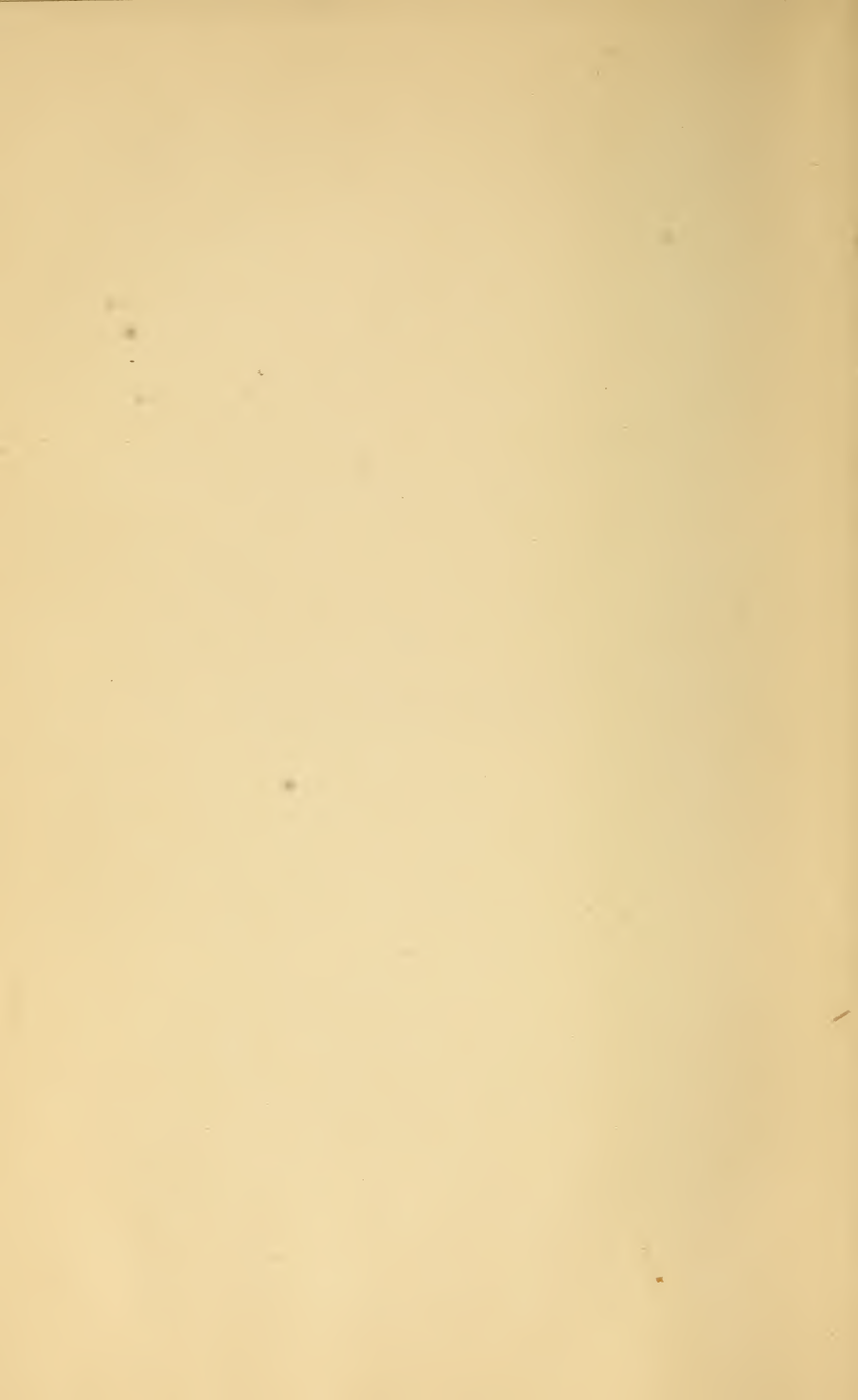
\* Ecclus. vii. 6.



IX.

*JESUS BEFORE HEROD.*





## IX.

### JESUS BEFORE HEROD..

“And when he understood that He belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him away to Herod.” (Luke xxiii. 7.)

IN declaring our Saviour innocent Pilate did not at the same time dismiss Him. He had clearly made known the judgment that he ought to have passed upon Him, but he did not dare pronounce it. The enemies of Christ penetrated his motive; they plainly saw that he feared to displease them, and they took the advantage thus given them by his weakness and sought to turn it to account. A sentence distinctly and briefly pronounced would have silenced them; a declaration so smoothly made only added to their excitement. Hence they renew their accusations, perhaps not with greater force, but certainly with more fury. Weak and timid men, such is the common result of your pusillanimous conduct; almost always it produces the effect most opposite to that which you expect. You may strive to manage two opposing parties, and you can satisfy neither. You will hurt both.

The party on the side of justice will fail to receive its due, nor will that on the side of cupidity obtain what it expects. To attach one's self to strict justice, and to execute it with fortitude, is not only the most virtuous and the most noble course, but also the most profitable and useful. It is the only means by which duty and interest can be reconciled. Have courage to be just, at the risk of displeasing the powerful and dangerous, and you will command the esteem of all good men ; and even those who hate you will be forced to respect you. If, on the contrary, you undertake to serve them at the expense of your conscience, you will become the object of universal contempt—and more especially of theirs. Profiting by your criminal weakness, they will despise you. Was it not a mark of contempt towards Pilate on the part of the Jews when they still demanded that he should condemn Christ, even after he had formally declared that he saw no guilt in Him? Was it not to make light of his decision to ask him to repeat it, when they produced no other proofs but such as he had found to be calumnious? If the timid policy of Pilate had not lost all elevation, all dignity, would he have suffered this insult? But the misguided magistrate

did not feel the abasement to which he delivered himself; he was solely occupied in striving to rid himself of the embarrassment in which he found himself between our Lord and His enemies; between *His* innocence and *their* wicked hatred; between the desire of saving Him and the fear of displeasing them.

At last he thought that a good opportunity offered itself of reconciling opposite sentiments and of satisfying all interests. Among the tumultuous cries raised against our Lord he heard a voice which said: "He stirred up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee to this place." \* He soon found that Jesus was a Galilean and hastened to send Him to Herod, the tetrarch, or king, of Galilee, who then happened to be in Jerusalem, probably on account of the paschal solemnity.

Two different motives conduced to determine Pilate to send our Lord to Herod. He thought that in the one act he would effect two splendid strokes of policy—that he would disengage himself from a judgment which pained him very much; and that he would regain the friendship of Herod, with whom he had some misunderstanding. Criminal policy this, which sacrifices

\* Luke xxiii. 5.

all duties, all virtues, to self-interest ! Disastrous policy, which, corrupting all states of society, from the sovereign to the lowest of his subjects, causes the greatest evils to which the human race is a prey ! False policy, which often loses its object, and of which he alone is generally the dupe who has the dishonesty to use it ! Pilate desired to deliver himself from the difficult alternative of having to condemn an innocent Man or of offending His numerous and powerful accusers. But was it sufficient for a judge not to be the oppressor of innocence ? Was he not appointed to be its protector ? Pilate possessed full authority to judge this cause ; it was committed to his tribunal ; he presided in the trial of it. Not to give judgment, when the side on which justice lay was fully known to him, was flagrant injustice in him whose duty was to give a just decision. His artifice avails him not ; Herod, sending Christ back to him, throws him again into the very embarrassment from which he tried to escape. He had done all the wrong of refusing to do justice ; and he does not profit by it. This magistrate, whose worldly prudence consisted in having no enemies, hopes to please Herod by sending Christ to him. He flatters himself that, moved by this mark of deference and recognition



of his authority, that prince would become his friend, and that a good understanding would henceforth subsist between them. But was there no reason to doubt whether Herod would be more scrupulous than himself, or that the murderer of John the Baptist would have much difficulty in being the murderer of Christ? This view of the case, which would have been very important in the mind of a just judge, does not affect him. Unhesitatingly he sacrifices the innocent Christ to the desire of pleasing Herod. That the just man should perish is all the same to him, provided he does not personally immolate Him; that the just man should perish he agrees, provided his reconciliation with Herod will follow. And it does follow; for we read that they became friends from that day. But a similar punishment awaits men similarly guilty; for both die in disgrace and exile.\*

Again, we may observe in the clamors of the Jews an artifice common to all imposture. They pretend that Christ had raised commotions in all Judea. So it is ever in calumny, which gathers strength in proportion to the accusations it makes. Throw much mire at a man, and some of it will adhere to him. Do they accuse Him of

\* Herod was banished to Lyons, and Pilate to Vienne.

any particular evil that He has done? It is general; "it is known *everywhere*." Do they mention any fact? No; the accursed trick is to say, "Every one has heard of it." This plan ought surely to have carried with it its own refutation; for, the more universal the knowledge the more witnesses could be obtained. Thus, for instance, if all Judea had been incited to sedition, the governor should have obtained information from numerous places. But the calumniator well knows that, in giving his accusations a wide extent, he will more successfully impose upon ignorance and influence weak minds. The more suspicions are raised the more fears are aroused; and he little cares whether he obtains full faith in his words, provided only that he leaves a bad impression.

Behold our Lord, then, before a third tribunal! Will He find more justice here than in the others? Herod, unlike the Sanhedrim, ~~has~~ has no hatred of Christ; he does not appear to have been, like Pilate, a weak and vacillating man; but he *was* a prince abandoned to his passions—and ~~whither~~ will they not drag a man who delivers himself up to their sway? Their first effect is to estrange him from religion, to inspire indifference to its teachings, and almost a contempt for all that

pertains to it. It is not always a formal incredulity that they produce ; but a carelessness and a levity which approach very near it and have the same effects. A man addicted to his passions no longer occupies himself with the things of God ; he expels from his mind all religious principles, inasmuch as they disturb his enjoyment ; he treats religion as something foreign to him—as something which, for him, does not exist. Having no restraint on the side of religion, he becomes capable of crimes abhorrent to human nature itself. It is not recorded that Herod was a wicked or a cruel man according to the ideas of the times in which he lived ; yet, at the request of a dancing-girl who had pleased him, he gave her the head of John the Baptist, although otherwise he had entertained much respect for the great Precursor. It is not recorded that he was an unbeliever ; yet he treats the Saviour of the world with impious derision.

Not only had Herod no opposition or enmity towards our Lord, but the sacred text expressly tells us that he had great joy in seeing Him ; that he had desired it a long time, having heard many things concerning Him, and hoped to see Him perform some great wonder. This disposition might have been laudable ; it would certainly

have been so if it had come from a religious feeling and from a desire to know and receive the truth in order to conform his life to it. It was neither the motive nor the object of this prince. If he had had the least desire of knowing the doctrine of our Blessed Saviour and of turning it to account, no opportunity was wanting to him. Jesus Christ had travelled through Judea for three years ; Galilee was frequently the theatre of His preaching and miracles. What prevented Herod all this time from knowing Him and from assuring himself by personal observation of the greatness of our Lord and His works? He had often had the desire, but a desire so light and fickle that he never took pains to satisfy it ; or at least a desire easily stifled by pleasure, dissipation, and debauchery. It may be that he even feared lest the knowledge of Christ and His miracles would only have subjected him to reproaches and correction on account of his disorderly life, as it had happened in the case of John the Baptist. This disposition is not rare even in our times. Among those who are regarded as unbelievers, and who profess themselves to be such, who in fact make a parade of it, the greatest number are of this description. They are incredulous, not by persua-

sion, but by levity ; not because they believe religion to be false, but because they desire it to be so ; not because they find the proofs of religion insufficient, but because they have never taken any pains to examine them. Like Herod, they would often have looked into these proofs, if their passions had given them time ; perhaps they are deterred, like him, by the fear that a restraint might thus be put upon them.

Herod was glad to see the man whose life, doctrine, and miracles were the wonder of all ; he was glad to see Him, not as a holy person whose words would have brought him to the practice of a virtuous life, but as an extraordinary Man about whom there was much spoken ; he was glad to see Him, not to hear His blessed doctrine and believe in it, but to learn of what it consisted, and what was the extraordinary eloquence that had carried away the whole country in admiration ; he was glad to see Him, in order to behold some of those great miracles which were a matter of wonder to all, but to him merely a matter of curiosity and nothing more. His desire of seeing Jesus Christ, and his joy when he did behold Him, were wanting in two essential points : first, it was a vain curiosity that urged him on, for he



wished, in beholding our Lord, only amusement or pastime ; secondly, he desired to witness His wonderful works only to subject them to a critical examination. He hoped to discover how they were effected. The means, as he considered, were human, but unknown. He was eager to display his penetration in detecting fraud, so that he might dispel the admiration excited by the miracles of Christ. He placed our Lord in the number of charlatans who amuse and astonish the public by their sleight of hand ; and His miracles he regarded as of the same kind, but not so easily known in their causes. Such was the state of mind in which our Lord found Herod when He was brought before him. He had never appeared at Herod's court ; it was really no fit theatre for His preaching. One of the proofs that He had given of the divinity of His mission was that "the poor had the Gospel preached to them." Those who delight in preaching in courts and in presence of the great ones of the world put a limit to the fruits of their labors ; these are confined to the glory and applause of men ; and how fleeting these are all must know. But those who, after the example of our Blessed Lord, seek not their own glory but the glory of God,

not personal reward but the salvation of souls, consider themselves as debtors to all in the exercise of their ministry. With equal zeal they announce the divine word in hamlets and in great cities, to the high and to the lowly. If they have a preference at all it is for the poor whom Jesus Christ honored by His preaching, who, having fewer means of knowledge, have, therefore, more need of instruction. Here it is that the Gospel ministry acquires more solid fruit among simple souls, and this is the only recompense worthy of such labors. Among the great the preacher is almost always out of place; for if he attacks prevailing vices he is treated as a bigot, and they are scandalized if he tells the plain truth. So that it is extremely difficult to assume a tone at once simple and elevated, humble and dignified; at once conformable to the modesty and dignity required by his state, and at the same time calculated to make his ministry felt and respected.

The enemies of Jesus Christ did not fail to pursue Him with their accusations before Herod. "And he questioned Him with many words; but He answered him nothing."\* The sacred historians do not tell us what these questions

\* Luke xxiii. 9.

were ; all that they say is that both in regard to the Jews and to Herod He was absolutely silent. That He deigned not to answer calumnies which contradicted one another need not surprise us ; it was thus He had treated them before Caiphas and Pilate. Before Herod He consistently observed the same line of conduct. But why did He, who for three years had not ceased to work miracles in favor of all who had sought them, refuse to perform a miracle at the desire of Herod ? Why was He so silent before this prince, considering that He seemed to feel it a duty incumbent upon Him to answer the questions proposed by the authority of Pilate and the high-priest ? Herod hoped that our Lord would perform some miracle before him, if it were for no other cause than to save His life. He had done great wonders for the benefit of men : He had given sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, health to the sick, and life to the dead. But when there is question of His own advantage He suspends His power and refuses to act. He could, without doubt, have miraculously disengaged Himself from the toils thrown around Him ; but this would not have accorded with the will of His Father. He would have failed

to accomplish the work with which He was charged ; He would have been impeded in the painful ministry with which He had clothed Himself. Resolved to die for our salvation, He will do nothing to save Himself. Another motive prevented Him from performing miracles at the request of Herod. He knew the dispositions of this irreligious prince, the frivolous and even criminal views in which he desired to see miracles. It ill-accorded, therefore, with the dignity of the Son of God to accommodate him. To establish, confirm, and recompense faith He could very well perform miracles ; but He was careful not to lavish them upon the fancies and caprices of impiety, which desired only to be amused and find material for criticism. His numerous and wonderful miracles had convinced all other men but Herod—that is, all who sought the truth in good faith. Our own generation, perverse and incredulous, like that in which our Lord lived, would like to see miracles as a condition of its belief. To men in bad faith living at that time He vouchsafed one miracle at least—the miracle of the prophet Jonas—his glorious resurrection after having been three days in the bowels of the earth. Of all other miracles this is the most striking, the most authen-

tic. Those who would not hear Moses and the Prophets would not hear the Apostles and Evangelists, nor even one who *had risen from the dead*. They would not be the less libertines and impious after this prodigy than they had been after others of which they must have had an entire certainty. And is it not true that the very men who desire miracles to convince them are those who declare, by a revolting inconsistency, that *every* miracle is incredible, impossible, and repugnant to the wisdom of God?

Our Blessed Saviour not only refused miracles to Herod, but even an answer. Amid the clamors of enemies, the manifold interrogations of the prince, the murmurs and jeers of courtiers, he maintained a dignified silence; He did not condescend to give to Herod the motive of that silence or to tell him that it was his vain curiosity and irreligion that caused it. He does not reproach him, as the Baptist had done, with his scandalous life, but *is silent*. A silence, oh! how admirable, and yet how terrible! Pilate, although a pagan, had admired this silence on a previous occasion; Herod, professing to have a knowledge of the true religion, is blind to its sublimity. This light and sensual man sees



not the grandeur and nobility of patience in suffering, firmness amid the most cruel outrages, calmness amid violent agitation, courage in refusing to justify Himself, and a complete abandonment of His glory and of life itself. All this was lost upon Herod and upon those who surrounded him. Men of the world, take care of the silence of Christ ! It is not when He thunders His menaces against you that He is most to be feared. The tone of angry rebuke is most merciful in its effects. But when you hear Him no more, then tremble ; then His justice will soon show itself. When He ceases to reproach you with your disorders, He abandons you to them ; it is His greatest punishment, and the most terrible He can inflict in this world. What Herod should have admired he despised. He treated the silence of Christ as stupidity, His patience as insensibility, His tranquillity as impotence. The sacred historian tells us that in this he was followed by all his court. Such is the invariable effect of the example of rulers upon their people, and especially the effect of their bad example. Let all in high places, leaders among their fellow-men, who have the misfortune to deliver themselves to their vices, think upon all who surround them, for whom

they have to care. The passions of a prince are the unhappy leaven which ferments and corrupts the whole state. His subjects are only too much disposed to give themselves to an evil course without his leading the way. How great will be their excesses when it shall have become not only an enjoyment but a species of duty to give way to them; when they are not only an object of pleasure but a step to fortune! The impiety of Herod at once finds imitators; he ridicules our Divine Saviour, and He is soon assailed by a torrent of sarcasms, railleries, and blasphemies. This is the deplorable manner in which He is ordinarily treated in the courts of the great. In the positions in which we ought to look for most religion we find in many instances the least. Those having most knowledge of what is true and good often wilfully close their eyes, so as to commit evil more freely. Their example, having greater weight on the side of virtue, has also greater influence on the side of vice. In the court of Herod was fulfilled the prophecy: "They shall deliver Him to the nations to be mocked." \* Pious souls, who model your lives on Christ's, you must expect to be treated like Him. Long ago holy Job said that "the sim-

\* Matt. xx. 19.

plicity of the just man is laughed to scorn.” \* Through all time ridicule is the strongest weapon of the libertine. He very well knows that a witty expression, how inapplicable soever it may be, is better received than truth ; that pleasant-ry has more force than reasoning. He ridicules virtue because he has not the courage to practise it ; he avenges the shame to which a virtuous life puts him by turning it into mockery. What will be the end of this detestable spirit of making light of all things sacred ? “ Woe,” says divine wisdom, “ to you who condemn religion and those who practise it ; for you also will one day be despised.” †

Finally, after Herod and his whole court had exhausted upon our Blessed Saviour their mockeries and blasphemies, the king, despising alike the Accused and His accusers, resolved to send Him back to Pilate. First, however, he put on Him a white garment, the customary habiliment of a fool.‡ In this state, covered with a robe of ignominy, surrounded by a crowd of accusers who cease not to load Him with insults, our dear Saviour again passes through the city of Jerusalem to the judgment-seat of him who had shown so much weakness. We shall soon see Pilate

\* Job xii. 4.

† Isaias xxxiii. 1.

‡ Luke xxiii. 11.

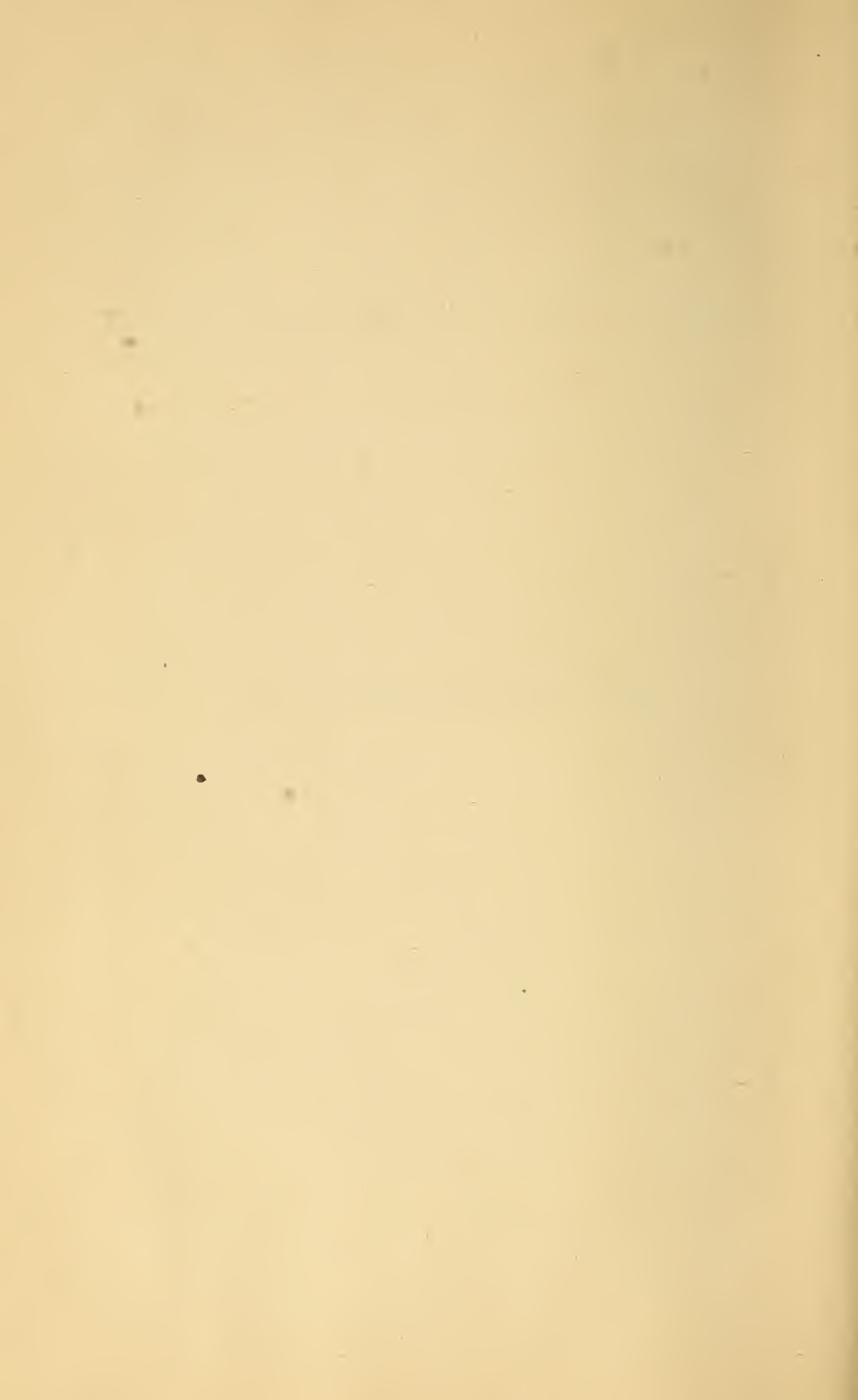
consummate his iniquity, and realize, by his union with Herod, the words of the prophet: "The kings of the earth stood up, and the princes united against the Lord and against His Christ." \*

\* Psalm ii. 2.

X.

*JESUS AGAIN BEFORE PILATE.*





## X.

### JESUS AGAIN BEFORE PILATE.

“And Herod sent Him back to Pilate.” (Luke xxiii. 11.)

ALTHOUGH the Evangelists do not mention it, we may easily conceive the chagrin which Pilate felt on the return of our Lord to his tribunal. If Herod's condescension in sending our Saviour back to him had in it something to flatter him, it was nevertheless much more a cause of affliction. It plunged him again into the embarrassment from which he thought he had escaped; he saw that he was the dupe of his own policy, and that at last he must pronounce judgment, and either condemn an innocent Man or dismiss Him contrary to the desires of numerous and powerful accusers. Either course was most painful to him. He wavered between his conscience, which he was afraid to wound, and his interest, which he was afraid to compromise. What will be the issue of this internal struggle? Alas! that which is always the issue; that which we have too often experienced. When he hesitated at all on a plain

question of duty he had already well-nigh violated that duty. Whoever trifles with temptation is very near falling into sin. It must be resisted from the first moment; a parley with it is almost a shameful capitulation. If Pilate had at first firmly pronounced the sentence which he felt to be just; if he had boldly declared that Christ was innocent, and His enemies calumniators, he would have triumphed over the vile temptation of self-interest. But his first fault drew him into others still worse, and, step by step, he soon reached the climax of iniquity.

He commenced by again representing to the enemies of our Lord that which had so poorly succeeded at first—namely, His innocence: “You have brought this Man to me as one that perverteth the people, and behold I, having examined Him before you, find no cause in this Man touching those things wherein you accuse Him. No, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him, and behold, nothing worthy of death is done to Him. I will chastise Him, therefore, and release Him.” \*

What a consequence, great God, of such a declaration! In what barbarous nation, by

\* Luke xxiii. 14, 15, 16.

what atrocious legislation, is a man declared innocent to be punished? And yet this monstrous iniquity in Pilate proceeds from the feeling of equity which still remains in his heart. It was a sentiment of pity and humanity towards Jesus that caused him to be thus cruel towards Him. He hoped that a simple chastisement would have prevented the desire for further persecution. He flattered himself that this compliance with the desires of the Jews would have satisfied them; but it only emboldens them more and more, and makes them feel Pilate's weakness and their own power. Thus far they have gained their point; they are convinced that, by insisting upon it, they can go much further.

Behold two judges of two different nations, of different manners, inclinations, prejudices, and principles; two judges who had been enemies, who had, generally speaking, no similar feelings or concurrence of ideas. Both acknowledge the innocence of Christ. They acknowledge it, so clear and evident is it, although Jesus Himself had neither said nor done anything to defend it. One of these judges several times repeats that he sees no guilt in Him; and yet it is this same judge

who at last condemns Him ! Is not this the last degree of inconsistency, the very lowest depth of iniquity ? Yes, truly, there is a monstrous contradiction, a revolting injustice, in a judge who, almost at the same moment, pronounces a man's innocence and condemnation. Here is a mystery which can only be explained by considering the views of Providence. In this light nothing is more congruous and equitable. Jesus Christ is Sanctity itself ; it is impossible to suppose Him personally sullied with the least stain of sin. But we must always remember that He is charged with the sins of others ; it is the painful load of our iniquities that He consents to bear. Hence we can say that, in the Providence of God, it was right that He should, at the same moment, be declared innocent and yet be condemned—innocent in Himself, condemned on account of us ; innocent of any personal crime, condemned for those of the human race. Thus, although Pilate made himself guilty of deicide, was he, without knowing it, the mouthpiece of divine justice ; and, by a singular coincidence, almost at the same moment he delivered his two judgments, so contradictory in the eyes of reason, yet so compatible in the eyes of faith.



An incident occurs, however, which aggravates the anxiety of Pilate and which ought to have determined his mind. Whilst sitting on the tribunal his wife sent a pressing message to him, imploring him not to participate in the trial of this just Man; because she had suffered much in a vision concerning Him.\* We may judge from this what feelings our Lord inspired. Not only Pilate but all those connected with him had the same esteem for Jesus. Should he not have taken courage from this universal belief and released Him? The message from his wife was a warning sent to him by the all-just God, a support for the right which his wavering conscience required. Whatever opinion Pilate may have had of dreams, he could not ignore the similarity between this dream and his own feelings; he must have been stricken with the conformity of the admonition which came from without with the inward remorse which agitated his own heart. The good sentiments still remaining in his soul, although greatly shattered, ought from this circumstance to have regained their full force. How many times, in our conflicts with temptation, have we not received,

\* Matt. xxvii. 19.

like Pilate, special aids of God's grace! How often, as in his case, have they been rendered useless by our weakness! God speaks to us and we hear Him; but we refuse to obey His voice. He runs to our support, but we allow ourselves to fall. The more means we have to prevent us from falling, the more culpable we are when we yield.

Pilate, seeing that the means he had proposed to save Jesus Christ did not satisfy His enemies, and that the thirst for His blood only became more insatiable, devised another expedient. It was to address the *people*, and to obtain from them what he had failed to obtain from their *chiefs*—thus persisting in demanding with humility that which he could and ought to have commanded with authority. According to custom, the governor, during the paschal solemnity, gave liberty to a prisoner at the request of the people. He believed it to be a favorable opportunity for obtaining the release of Jesus Christ. There was then in prison a well-known malefactor named Barabbas, who had committed murder. Pilate doubted not but that, in proposing a choice between Christ, who had been pursued by the hatred of the principal men only, and Barabbas, who was an object of general execra-

tion, the people, who did not participate in the animosity of their leaders, and who testified their admiration for Christ on so many occasions, would prefer Him to Barabbas. In this he debased the Saviour of the world, or rather he debased himself by exposing a Man of whose justice and innocence he was convinced to a comparison with a notorious brigand. He inquired of the assembled Jews which would he release? "To whom have you likened Me, and made Me equal, and compared Me?" asks our Lord through the prophet.\* The Saint of saints is placed on a level with the greatest criminal that is found in the prisons of Jerusalem. But it is only the beginning of the ignominy, of which the comparison itself is a prelude. The very means which Pilate had employed to save Christ the princes and priests quickly seized upon to effect His destruction. Oh! God, how slowly and with what difficulty a good work is done; and how promptly and easily evil is committed! Up to this time the people had been mere spectators of this affair; it was the chiefs who had pursued our Lord with their rage. If a great number had followed Him to the tribunals whither He had been drag-

\* *Isaias* xli. 5.

ged, many of them had been drawn by curiosity or pity. Their minds were, in some degree, still imbued with the admiration they had hitherto conceived for Him, mingled, perhaps, with a sort of contempt for the condition in which they saw Him. On the one hand they remembered His benefits and miracles; on the other they saw Him accused, contemned, outraged by the men of their own nation for whom they had been taught to have respect. They saw Him maltreated before Pilate, mocked and despised by Herod. The proposition of Pilate found the Jews, therefore, wavering between contrary sentiments; the pontiffs, priests, doctors, and ancients had no difficulty in turning the scale. They soon spread themselves amongst the people, and by suggestions, intrigues, exhortations, and calumnies they persuaded them to ask for the release of Barabbas and the death of Christ. All at once the cry is heard from the assembled multitude: "Away with Him! away with Him! and release unto us Barabbas." \* No voice is raised on the side of innocence; it is a general conspiracy, the work of a moment. Between the God of all virtues and a man of all crimes the

\* John xix. 15; Luke xxiii. 18.

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people do not hesitate in their choice. The mere comparison with Barabbas was a deep humiliation to Christ; the preference given by the whole people to this miscreant is the vilest opprobrium. Judge of it yourselves (and here I address many), you who are so sensitive in seeing others preferred to you, sometimes thoughtlessly and often justly. Are you not constantly comparing yourselves with others and giving yourselves the preference? Are you not afflicted and irritated beyond measure when you think others obtain regard and homage which are withheld from you? Suspicious and envious men, contemplate your Master, Sovereign Lord of all that exists, degraded by a whole nation below the vilest criminal, who is preferred to Him. Learn from His firmness and constancy to receive with tranquillity the pretended humiliations which affect you so sensibly; no longer to consider the honors conferred on others a prejudice to you, and not to take offence if the same deference is not shown to you that is shown to others. Consider the distance between you and Jesus Christ; and the immense difference between the slight neglect which troubles you and the horrible ignominy which He endures.



We cannot doubt, although the sacred text does not inform us, that Pilate was surprised at the awful choice made by the people; that he was afflicted to see his effort in behalf of Christ have a different effect from what he desired; and that his embarrassment was now greater than ever, inasmuch as the people as well as their rulers were arrayed against him. His conduct on this occasion clearly manifested his deep anxiety. "What shall I do then with Jesus, who is called Christ?"\* Timorous judge! It was for him to command what he had the power to effect. He seems to obey those whom he was appointed to command. To decide upon the fate of one that he has declared innocent, whose advice does he ask? The advice of the accusers and persecutors of this same Man. He throws the scales of justice into the hands of those who, he is convinced, are clamoring for the most criminal injustice. Hence his guilty condescension can have no effect but to inflame the hatred and anger of those whom he wished to pacify. "Crucify Him!" they all cry out. In vain does Pilate ask: "What evil has he done?"† He no longer aims at specific accusations requiring proofs. "Crucify Him!" they

\* Matt. xxvii. 22.

† Matt. xxvii. 23.

answer with increased fury. "Crucify Him!" It is the only reason the unreasoning multitude can give; it is the only means by which the magistrate can save himself. "Crucify Him!" It is the only word that is allowed to reach the ears of the governor until he executes it. Priests, scribes, and Pharisees all condense their dreadful purpose in one short sentence; they have taken care to put that word in the mouths of all, to give it greater weight. That which our Lord in His preaching had often predicted; that which, up to this moment, no one could have expected; that which the Apostles could not understand when He announced it to them, now begins to assume form and to appear in a clear light. That terrible word, "Crucify Him!" has been pronounced. Oh! yes; and it will be executed. And whatever efforts Pilate may make to save Him, whatever devices he may conjure up to save himself from an act of foul injustice, will fail; and he himself will be forced to execute the behests of that infernal spirit which his wretched policy has evoked and to which he will have the meanness to submit.

And who is this *people* who with such violent fury cry out for the death of Jesus Christ,

and that death the most ignominious? Awful example of human inconstancy and baseness! It is the same people who with enthusiastic attachment had continually followed our Blessed Saviour; who had only a little while before desired to make Him king; who, five days previously, had received Him in triumph on His entry into Jerusalem. How easily and how quickly they pass from admiration to contempt; from transports of love to transports of rage; from the shout of joy, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" to the cry of fury, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" When I hear in the time of the old law ardent prayers addressed to Heaven for so long a time by a whole nation to hasten the coming down of the Messiah; when I hear the desire so often expressed that the clouds would rain down the Just One—and then when I take the Gospels and read in them the terrible treatment inflicted by that same nation upon the Messiah when He comes, I am forced to exclaim: O inconsistent, O barbarous people! Was it to treat Him with all this indignity you desired Him? Was it to make Him an object of outrage and cruelty that you asked Him of His Father? Astonishing! A people enlightened by the light of faith, a people who had most ear-

nestly desired the Messiah, persecute Him even to death ; and a gentile, an idolatrous magistrate, to whom Christ is in every way a stranger, defends Him ! O blind race ! What, then, is the motive of your fury ? When Pilate asked, What evil has He done ; which of you has cause of complaint against Him ? you could make Him no answer. Follow His life step by step, and you will find it full of benefits to you. Can it be that the blind who had received sight, the lame who had received power to walk, the sick of various diseases who were cured, the dead who were raised to life, are also among His persecutors ? We know not but that it may be so.

With just reason we are indignant at this monstrous ingratitude of the Jews, but we never think of turning our indignation against ourselves, who are not less culpable. In every sin that we commit we not only compare the demon with Jesus Christ, but we give the preference to the demon ; we not only afflict the Saviour of our souls, but we crucify Him again. Like the Jews, we cry out : Away with a God so exacting, so severe, so difficult to serve ; with a Gospel so rigorous, so contrary to our desires ; and give us the objects of our concupiscences ;

let us assuage our vengeance ; let us amass fortunes ; let us acquire honors ; let us have all manner of enjoyment. Yes, even though Christ be offended, outraged again, what matters it, if we are satisfied ? And, like Pilate, we allow our lax and feeble will, after a weak resistance, to give to our passions what they imperiously demand, although it be the sacrifice of God Himself. If we are candid we must acknowledge that this is what often passes in our consciences. It is in vain we excuse ourselves by saying that we often do wrong without reflection or positive deliberation, but only by surprise and in the first movement of passion. When the Jews cried out, Away with Christ, give us Barabbas ! was it not also a sudden transport of passion excited in them by their rulers ? Whether it is by reflection, as it was amongst the chief men of the Jews, or by a sudden impulse, as it was amongst the common people ; the action itself is no less criminal when by it we prefer Satan to God and renew the Passion of Jesus Christ.

Ever agitated by the double fear of shedding innocent blood and of compromising himself with those who were ready to turn against him, Pilate thought of a means of freeing himself from crime and of throwing upon them all re-



sponsibility. He ordered water and washed his hands in the midst of the assembly of the people, and in a loud voice declared: "I am innocent of the blood of this just Man; look you to it." \* Vain and foolish ceremony! Protestation useless and ridiculous! It not only does not change the iniquity, but shows that he feels the full gravity of the act, and therefore is he inexcusably culpable. How could a judge in good faith believe himself innocent when he allowed a crime to be committed, when it was his duty and he had the power to prevent it? Does he not really participate in such a crime when in his deliberate judgment it is a crime, and yet he allows it to be perpetrated? Behold the extent of Pilate's illusion! Without doubt, O blind and iniquitous magistrate! the persecution of Jesus by the Jews is their concern, but the sentence which they are forcing you to give is certainly yours. The blood of the just Man, as you style Him, will indeed be upon them; but you will be responsible to Heaven, which prepares terrible chastisements for you, and to this earth, to the children of which you will be an object of contempt to the latest posterity.

This false conscience which Pilate formed is

\* Matt. xxvii. 24.

of all evils the most disastrous and, unhappily, one of the most common in the world. What resource remains to the sinner who has come to that degree of iniquity that he begins to justify himself to himself for his evil course? What remains for him in the way of salvation when the interior guide given him by the Almighty Himself is made to contribute to his fatal errors? When the prophet prayed the Lord to take signal vengeance upon the crimes of his people he could not imagine anything more terrible than blindness of heart and mind, which would put an insurmountable obstacle to their conversion.\* And what is more terrible still is the unhappy facility with which a treaty is formed between conscience and sin. It is not always easy for a man, how abandoned soever he may be, to suppress all terrors, to abjure all principles, to scout all idea of vice and virtue, and of God who punishes the one and rewards the other. Securely to intrench him in his rampart of evil, the passions ordinarily take a more circuitous and, therefore, a more dangerous course. They cannot destroy faith, but they elude it. They cannot stifle conscience, but they pervert it. Whether we turn our eyes upon ourselves or upon

\* *Isaias vi. 10.*

others whose lives are known to us, experience constantly tells us that man much more frequently judges by the heart than by the mind ; by sentiment rather than by reason. His desires generally cloud his mind, and his affections generally influence his opinions. He easily approves what pleases him, and readily justifies what he loves. Thus, instead of regulating his desires according to conscience, his conscience is formed by his desires. The easier it is thus to be deluded the more need there is of being on our guard. See to what an excess Pilate was hurried. Alas ! I deceive myself like him if in my sin I imagine myself not guilty of the blood of Jesus Christ. Is it not for me this blood was shed ? Ah ! at least let the sight of this precious stream, flowing because of my iniquities, make me acknowledge all their horror and fill me with profound grief for them.

A pagan magistrate washes his hands of the blood of Christ ; the chosen people of God are ambitious to be stained with it. What fills with horror a man having no interior guide but the light of reason, fills with savage joy a whole nation which has been enlightened by true religion. These people hesitate not to take upon themselves all the infamy of this abominable crime,

and to condemn themselves to all the terrible chastisements consequent upon it. "His blood be upon us and upon our children." \* In this they announce an awful prophecy, which, for more than eighteen hundred years, has not ceased to be accomplished in them. The divine vengeance only gives effect to the decree which the Jews pronounced upon themselves. To the chastisement of the deicide they have associated the most remote generations ; they have transmitted to their children, as a peculiar heritage, the maledictions of Heaven and earth which they invoked. Their unhappy offspring are still plunged into a spiritual blindness and a temporal ruin which their fathers' curse has brought upon them. When we deliver ourselves to a spirit of contempt of the law of God, of His promises and threats, of His manifold graces, do we not invoke the same maledictions which the Jews invoked ? Do we not consent that the blood of Jesus Christ, which we render useless, which we profane, the effect of which we throw away, should fall upon our heads ? The blood shed for us by our Blessed Redeemer will necessarily procure for us either our salvation or our eternal ruin ; it will either justify or condemn us. More strong-

\* Matt. xxvii. 25.

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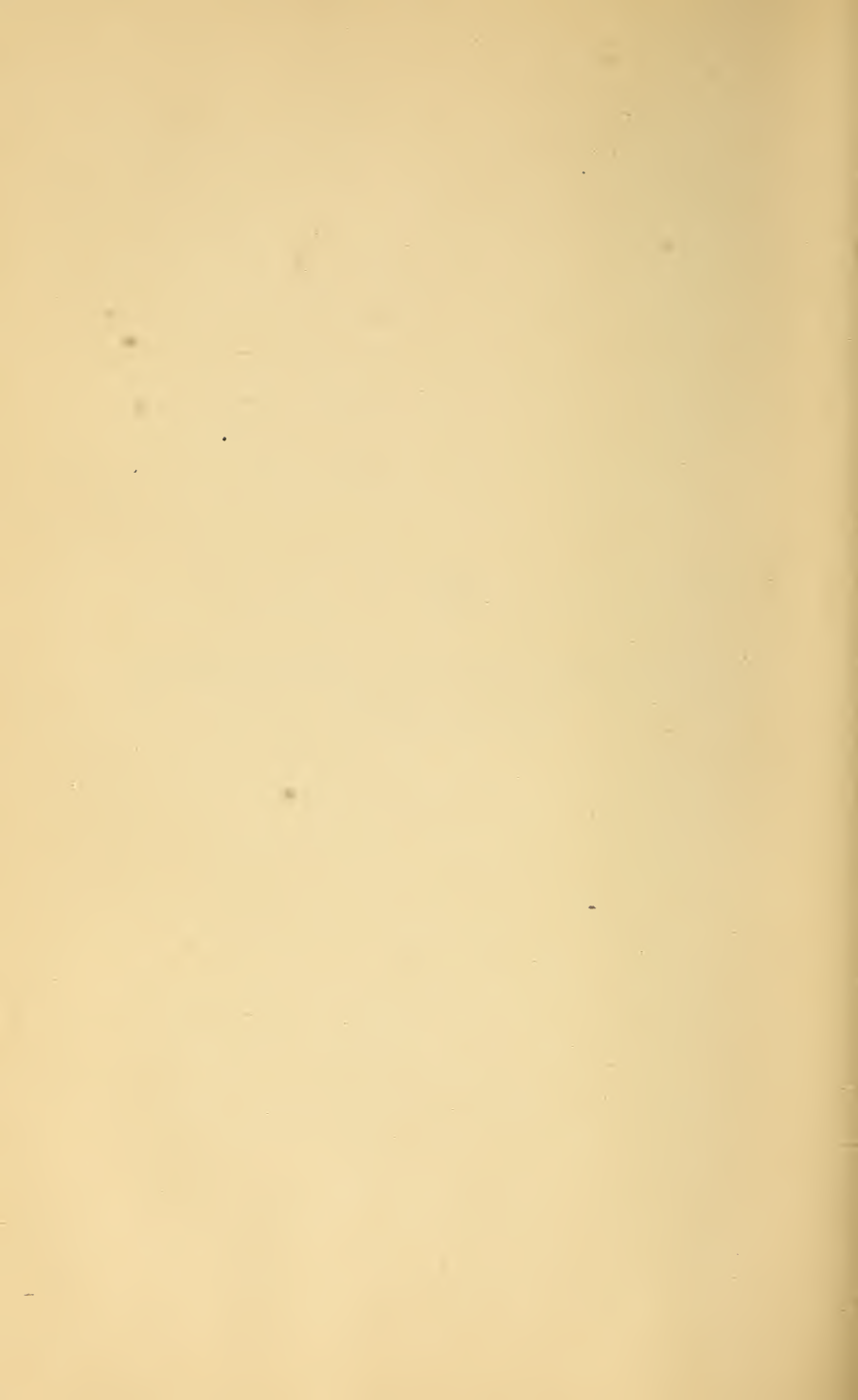
ly than the blood of Abel does this divine blood cry out; it implores mercy in our favor or justice against us. Ah! let us say to our Lord, like the Jews, but in a different sense, "His blood be upon us," to enlighten our minds, to direct our hearts in the pursuit of His holy law, to sustain our wills, to purify our consciences. His blood be upon us, to convert us, to sanctify us, to save us, to shed upon us the abundance of His graces, of which it is the fertile source, and to make us worthy of that glory the enjoyment of which He has purchased for us.





## XI.

*THE SCOURGING, CROWNING, AND CONDEMNATION OF JESUS.*



## XI.

### THE SCOURGING, CROWNING, AND CONDEMNATION OF JESUS.

“ Behold the Man ! ” (John xix. 5.)

WITH a view to save our Blessed Lord from a cruel and disgraceful death, so bitterly desired by the Jews, Pilate proposed to scourge Him and then release Him. When he saw that this made no impression on them, he concluded that the reality would surely soften their hearts. He flattered himself with the delusion that the sight of Him whom they had lately held in such esteem, now torn with wounds and frightfully bruised, would turn them to pity ; and that, in complying thus far with their desires, he would bring them to better dispositions. Strange device in a man invested with authority ! Resource as unreasonable as it was iniquitous ! Should not Pilate have foreseen that this addition to the fuel of the flame of popular frenzy, instead of extinguishing it, would make it burn with greater fury ? Ought he not to have sufficiently known this people, especially the ene-

mies of Christ, to be convinced that this condescension to their brutal demands would encourage them to seek for something more? Was not this his experience from the beginning of the sad tragedy? Ever blinded by weakness, ever confounding his hopes with his desires, he commits an awful injustice through the desire of being just. He blackens himself with an enormous cruelty to bring those subject to his rule to the common feelings of humanity. Thus does he give orders that Christ should be delivered to the soldiers to be scourged.

The Evangelists have not given us the details of this cruel flagellation. But all had been revealed long before by the prophets. Their oracles constitute a history in advance of this terrible transaction. Let us represent to ourselves our dear Lord as He is prepared for the scourging.

He is stripped of His clothing and strongly bound to a pillar, as was the custom of the Romans. In this state a band of unfeeling men give Him blow upon blow, as if they were working on an anvil. His torn flesh, falling in shreds, almost enables the bystanders to number His bones. Here is the fulfilment of the words of the Psalmist: "They have dug My hands and



feet; they have numbered all My bones.”\* New wounds are added to the old ones; and soon His body is only one great wound incapable of cure or relief. These atrocities are hardly credible, and we would think them exaggerated if they were not so minutely detailed. No voice of pity is heard; no tear of sympathy is shed; no heart is moved. If He look around He sees only His executioners, who so relentlessly perform their part. If He look beyond these He sees His enemies, who cruelly enjoy His tortures. Yet, amid these terrible sufferings, He remains calm and serene; no cry, no reproach, no complaint escapes His lips. And here the prophecy is again fulfilled: “He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter; and shall be dumb as a lamb before His shearer; and He shall not open His mouth.”† In truth, the soldiers are more weary of their cruel work than He is tired of torture.

One species of torture succeeds another; and the soldiers to whom He is abandoned by Pilate well know how to aggravate His pains. The weak governor, either through indifference, or, as it is more likely, in order that our dear Lord should become an object of greater pity,

\* Ps. xxi. 18.

† Isaiah liii. 7.

leaves Him a prey to their fury and insults. Up to this time torments and outrages had been heaped upon Him in succession ; soon we shall see them combined in one act. In the various accusations against Him the soldiers had heard that He had pretended to be a king. In this they resolved in a special manner to punish Him. They took a purple garment and put it on Him as a royal robe, and placed a reed in His hand for a sceptre. *But there is wanting a crown for the mock king.* Here the climax of cruelty is reached. His head is the only part that has escaped torture ; now it must bear its own punishment. It is a punishment till then unknown. They procure thorns, and, plaiting them in the form of a crown, *press* it violently upon His head. Every thorn makes a new wound ; and every wound sends forth a stream of blood. And this blood coursing down His heavenly face makes Him an object of compassion, or rather of horror. It was all written long before by the prophet Isaias : “ He was despised and the most abject of men ; a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity. And His look was as it were hidden and despised ; wherefore we esteemed Him not. Surely He hath borne our infirmities and carried our

sorrows ; and we have thought Him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our iniquities and bruised for our sins. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him ; and by His bruises we are healed." \* The deplorable state to which the soldiers had brought Him seemed rather to redouble their fury than excite their pity. The mockeries and insults of the house of Cai-phas are repeated. They bend the knee before Him, saluting Him in derision as King of the Jews. They strike Him in the face and cover Him with spittle. They take the reed from His hand and with it give Him a blow upon the head. Yet all these outrages, all these torments, disturb not in the least the equanimity of this Lamb of God. His only opposition to so much injury is a modest and unbroken silence. Nothing troubles His serenity ; nothing breaks His temper. He might have appealed to Pilate to mitigate the violence with which He was treated ; and, as it had neither been intended nor commanded, it would have been checked. But let us view it in another and a truer light : If men had not condemned Him to this, His Father in Heaven would have done

\* *Isaias liii. 3, 4, 5.*

so ; and resignation to the divine decree held supreme command over His whole conduct.

These new indignities heaped upon our Lord bear in them, as the holy Fathers tell us, the symbols of great mysteries. In the minds of the soldiers the royal honors He received were a reproach ; but, in the designs of Providence, they bear a different signification and contain a great truth. Without knowing it, these cruel men were instruments of that eternal wisdom and power which they industriously insulted. Jesus is our King. He is essentially, and by His divine nature, the Ruler of ages and the King of glory. But as man, and in quality of Messiah, He was still King of the Jews. And, like David, His ancestor in the flesh, He was established on Mount Sion, from which He delivered the commands of God. The empire thus given Him by His Father was indeed of wider extent than Judea, for it reached even to the ends of the earth. "Thou art my Son ; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the nations for Thy inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for Thy possession." \* Daniel, in the spirit of prophecy, had seen the Son of Man invested with uni-

\* Ps. ii. 7, 8.

versal empire. "I looked, therefore, in the vision of the night, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven; and He came even to the Ancient of days; and they presented Him before Him. And He gave Him power and glory and a kingdom; and all peoples, tribes, and tongues shall serve Him. His power is an everlasting power that shall not be taken away; and His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." \*

But the royalty with which the Son of Man is invested was given to Him only after He was offered to His Father in His Passion. Only then did He acquire the right to exercise His functions of King. Thus it is in St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians: "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even to the death of the cross; therefore God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name above every other name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend in Heaven, on earth, and in hell." † And again, "We see Jesus, *for the suffering of death*, crowned with glory and honor." ‡ Now, if by His Passion He acquired royalty, was it not proper that this royalty should be published, recognized, and verified in His Passion itself?

\* Daniel vii. 13, 14.

† Philipp. ii. 8, 9, 10.

‡ Heb. ii. 9.



Was it not fitting that it should be solemnly promulgated even by the insolence and outrages of His enemies? And for this reason Pilate also gave Him the title of King in the writing which he fastened on the cross. Even when the Jews would have it removed he persistently refused to grant their request.

The very ornaments of royalty with which the soldiers cover our Lord in derision have also their special significance. No other mantle, no other sceptre, no other crown would have so exactly characterized the kingship of our Divine Master. The purple cloak signifies that His kingdom on earth will be established by the effusion of His blood; and that it will be extended and cemented by the blood of martyrs. The reed, as a sceptre, signifies that His power is not to appear in the world through violence, but that, on the contrary, He will by weakness itself confound the strong. The crown of thorns signifies that He is indeed the King of all who suffer, and that all His true and loyal subjects must be prepared for afflictions and crosses. Each and every outrage inflicted upon Him has its own special meaning. They all teach us that the kingdom of Jesus Christ, far from conferring earthly honors, prescribes rather their contempt.

To take our places in that kingdom we must, like St. Paul, be ready to glory in humiliation and persecution.

In this awful condition to which our Lord was reduced Pilate believed that at length he would bring the Jews to a sense of mercy and compassion. He counted especially upon the common people. And, in effect, how could he have supposed that an unhappy man, scarcely recognizable as living, would fail to excite commiseration? To the touching spectacle Pilate desired to add a new proof of his innocence. "Behold," he would say to the assembled Jews, "what I have inflicted upon Him, although I have found no cause against Him." Therefore he commands Jesus to be brought forward, His head crowned with thorns, His shoulders covered with the purple robe; and in this sad state presenting Him to the multitude, he says: "Behold the Man."

Oh! how much is contained in these few words! Behold the Man, ye Jews! He it is that was promised to your fathers and to yourselves; this is He for whom you prayed, for whom you anxiously sighed for many an age. This is He who traversed your fields and filled them with the wonders of His power, dispensing

on all sides the benefits of His miracles and His doctrine. This is He whom you have beheld with delight, whom you have followed with gratitude, to whom you have listened with enthusiasm, and whom you went from the city to receive in triumph. What a difference between what He was and what He is; between what you thought of Him then and what you think of Him now!

Mortals of all times, of all ranks, behold the Heavenly Father bringing before you His only-begotten Son, consubstantial with Himself, and now degraded to this frightful condition. See Him outraged, wounded, and bathed in His own blood.

Great men of the world, encompassed on every side by power and dignity, behold the Man! Consider, first of all, what He is and the excess of humiliation to which He has freely reduced Himself; and then how little indeed you are and what your false pride makes you think of yourselves. Is it not enough to cover you with shame when you reflect that it was to expiate the pride of your first parents and to repress yours He is reduced to this extremity? If the sight presented to you to-day be not sufficient to stifle your vain-glory, then reflect upon the day

in which He will come in triumph to put it down for ever and reduce it to ashes.

Rich men of the world who wallow in pleasure and sensuality, behold the Man! Consider Him in the most dreadful state of torture, and yourselves surfeited with sensual delight. See Him bathed in blood and yourselves swimming in pleasures. All His wounds are so many open mouths to condemn your sinful revelries. Subjects of a King crowned with thorns, learn from the sight of His head, covered with blood, to retrench vain delicacies; and, in seeing His flesh so cruelly torn, think of what your guilty flesh so justly deserves.

Miserable souls of all descriptions—indigent, afflicted, infirm—behold the Man! This is the lesson in suffering He gives you. It is from these sufferings yours acquire strength and efficacy. Murmur no more about a state of life so much resembling His. Let your greatest effort ever be, in contemplating this Divine Model, to realize it in yourselves as far as you can. Resign yourselves to the will of God, like Him, and unite your sufferings to His. He has chosen to be your precursor in the career of tribulation; let Him be your model also. This is the road by which He entered into His

glory ; it is the only road that will lead you thither.

Sinners, behold the Man ! Acknowledge your own work in the state in which you see Him. It is you who, by the hands of the soldiers, have scourged Him, torn His sacred flesh, crowned Him with thorns, and disfigured His whole person. Are you at length satisfied ? Have you not already caused Him too much opprobrium ? Will the sight of the Man of sorrows soften your hearts or render them harder than ever ? In presence of this doleful spectacle will you not give up that shameful passion, break that sinful engagement, reform that bad habit which has too long brought anguish to His soul ? If you add sin to sin, do you not inflict new torments upon Him, crying out with the barbarous Jews : “Crucify Him ! crucify Him” ?

Penitents, behold the Man ! Behold the penance He has performed for your sins ! Rigorous and terrible though it be, there is still wanting something to render it efficacious. It is that which, after the example of St. Paul, you ought to accomplish in your own flesh. Without the penance of our Blessed Saviour yours would be fruitless ; without yours His cannot be applied. His penance gives value to yours ; yours gives



effect to His. Let His penance, then, sustain your life of penance; let it be your model.

Just and faithful men, behold the Man! Behold the Head of the mystical body of which you are the members. Behold the Model of all the elect; behold your Model. Behold Him whose spirit has hitherto animated you; whose maxims have been your guide; whose example has been your rule of life. Having commenced well, persevere firmly to the end. Let the grand evidence of love before your eyes inflame your pure love more and more. Let the thought of His constancy, amid so many sufferings, sustain you in all your trials.

But, O God! what is it that we hear? At the sight of our dear Redeemer, so cruelly tortured, the pontiffs and their retainers, transported with fresh fury, cry out again: "Away with Him! crucify Him! crucify Him!" There is no evidence that the people generally took part in this accursed cry. It is probable that the heartrending spectacle which the governor brought before them had begun to work in their hearts feelings of pity. But it does not appear that they manifested those feelings. The chief priests and their followers were allowed to vent their fury against our Lord.

But compassion for Him, if it really existed at that trying time, was kept under strict control. Whether it was a dread of those in power or a feeling of doubt that pervaded the multitude, they assuredly did not manifest their compassion by any outward signs. Is not this the case in the world every day? The impious, hypocritical, and depraved, restrained by no human respect, unblushingly attack religion, piety, and virtue; whilst the well-disposed, either through fear or false moderation, timidly hold their peace. Evil is ever bold and full of turbulent force; but truth and virtue often appear wanting in courage. Certain it is that truth and virtue have their defenders when they are not attacked; but if opposition to them become the custom of the hour, then their active defenders are few indeed. In other words, it seems much more agreeable even for good men to rejoice with Christ on Thabor than suffer with Him on Calvary. Let us now cast a glance at the attempts made by Pilate to save Christ. Without exception they have been fruitless. Instead of preventing the sufferings of our Lord they have aggravated them. Pilate's inbred weakness seems all along to have conspired with the malice of the Jews in load-

ing an innocent victim with cruel injuries. But, in the language of faith, we should rather say that the divine decree which, in the first place, condemned Him, makes executioners not only of His professed enemies but of His weak defender. For if the governor declare Him innocent, all at once a thousand cries are raised declaring Him guilty. If Pilate propose a choice between our Lord and Barabbas, it is only to bring out in the strongest light the insult and ignominy involved in the shameful comparison and preference which is the result. If He be sent to Herod it is to be despised, ill-treated, and mocked. If scourging be resorted to it produces only more cruel torments and more bitter insults. What a lesson is this for us! When there is question of duty all temporizing measures must be severely put aside.

To attempt to reconcile conscience and passion is a project equally vicious and foolish. No truce can exist between these irreconcilable enemies. It is inevitable that one of them must crush the other; and whoever tries to reconcile them takes the side of vice against virtue.

Keenly desirous of not being responsible for the death of Christ, Pilate then said to the Jews that they might take Him and put Him

to death according to their own laws, declaring, at the same time, that no crime was found in Him. But the Jews, who had no power to crucify a man at any time, and could inflict no punishment, even on the worst criminal, while the paschal solemnity continued, strongly insisted upon their request. "We have a law," they say, "and according to the law, He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." \*

If Pilate had asked them to show him that law they would indeed have been embarrassed. They would probably have quoted the law that condemned blasphemers to death; but they would have failed to prove Christ a blasphemer, for He had proclaimed Himself to be the Son of God in the proper and natural sense, and had proved it. In all His public instructions He constantly took this title and character. He clearly proclaimed the fact before Caiphas and the Jewish council; but He justified the claim by the performance of many miracles and by the perfect fulfilment of the prophecies in His own person. Pilate understood all this. He felt that the imputation against our Lord of His having called Himself the Son

\* John xix. 7.

of God was not in the metaphorical sense, but in the true and natural sense. Pilate's conviction of our Lord's innocence, his knowledge of the great miracles that had been performed, the wonderful answers of our Lord, even His silence and all other circumstances connected with Him, had made a deep impression on him. He may, indeed, have connected these ideas with the notions of idolatry in which he had been reared, and with the fables relating to the divine origin of the heroes of the pagan world, but he still made other efforts to save Christ from death. "And he entered into the hall again, and he said to Jesus: Whence art Thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore saith to Him: Speakest Thou not to me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and I have power to release Thee? Jesus answered: Thou shouldst not have any power against Me, unless it were given thee from above. Therefore he that hath delivered Me to thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release Him." \* Let us bear in mind that it is when He is receiving the most horrible treatment from Pilate, and when He is threatened with still more ter-

\* John xix. 9, 10, 11, 12.



rible indignities, that He answers in this tone of conscious superiority. He is even then in the frightful condition to which the scourging and crowning with thorns have brought Him. All bruised as He is and weakened with loss of blood, loaded with injuries of all kinds, He nevertheless shows forth a royal bearing. He does not deny that He had claimed to be the Son of God; He confirms it. See what a lesson He gives to the magistrate into whose power He is thrown, and of whose further rigor He is soon to have experience! He teaches Pilate whence his power is derived, while He submits to it. He asserts His own position as Master and Ruler, yet subjects Himself to the power of one of His own creatures. Pilate is deeply moved by the grandeur of this reply, and desires more and more to release Him. In all this, however, we only see more clearly the weakness of the man. He goes from the Jews to Christ, and from Christ back again to the Jews, several times, filled with uneasy apprehensions when addressing them, and filled with admiration when addressing Him.

But the enemies of our Lord, penetrating Pilate's disposition and noticing the contrast between his desires and his fears, employed a

final resource more effectual than all the rest. "If thou release this Man," they cried, "thou art not Cæsar's friend; for whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar." \* Startled by these words, he yet pleads for our Lord; but his words are drowned in the terrible cry: "We have no king but Cæsar. And then Pilate delivered Him to them to be crucified." † He had hesitated much lest he should compromise himself in the good-will of the Jews, even when he saw they were in the wrong; but to displease Cæsar, or to be accused before him of want of zeal in upholding his power, is a much more serious matter. Until now he had resisted their demands, although feebly; but at the name of Cæsar all of honor, conscience, spirit, or sense of justice that remained vanished. Weakness was the beginning of his iniquity; ambition brought it to a climax. Alas! how many there are, and these in the highest ranks, who are more intent on pleasing Cæsar than God; who sacrifice the interests of God more readily than those of Cæsar!

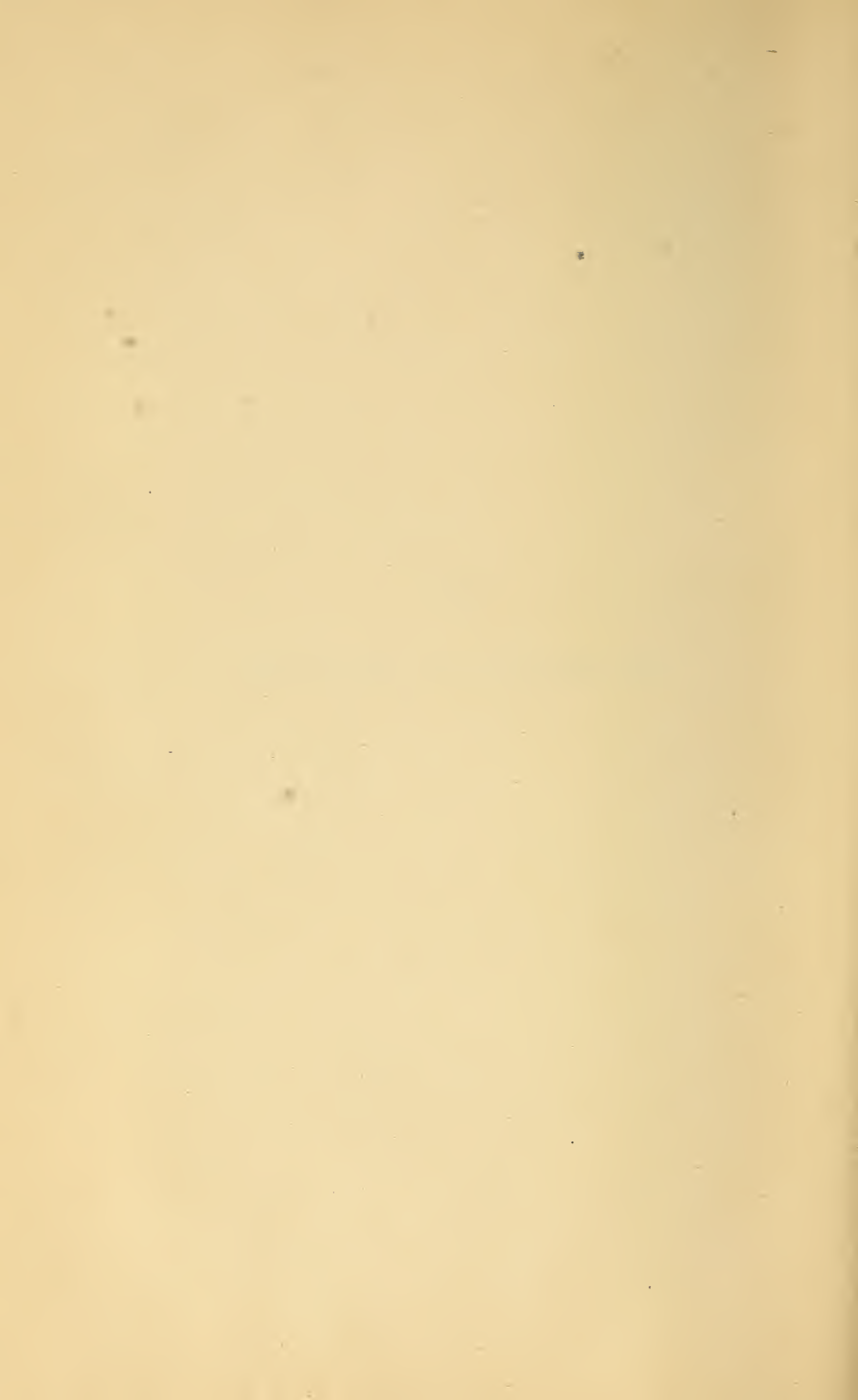
\* John xix. 12.

† Ib. 16.



XII.

*THE CARRIAGE OF THE CROSS.*





## XII.

### THE CARRIAGE OF THE CROSS.

“ And they forced one Simon of Cyrene, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to take up His cross ” (Mark xv. 21.)

SCARCELY had the sentence been passed when immediate steps were taken for its execution. The fury of His enemies brooked no delay. They impatiently thirsted for His blood. They at once seized Him and brought Him to the place of execution. As the victims of the old law had been brought out from the camps of the people to be consumed as an expiatory sacrifice, so also, in the language of St. Paul, the expiatory sacrifice for the sins of the whole world is dragged from the city to be offered up.\* O Jerusalem! until now the most favored of cities, the object of God's special love, the only place in the universe in which He deigned to dwell, the only place in which a true worship was offered to Him, behold how you are become the most unfortunate of all, an ob-

\* Heb. xiii. 12.

ject of His vengeance, never again to be found worthy to offer a victim that He will not hold in abhorrence. Your temple is proscribed, your ruin pronounced ! You force Jesus outside your walls ; He will never return ! He takes with Him all the heavenly blessings with which you have been so long favored, and scatters them among the nations. Follow Him in this terrible journey to which you have condemned Him ; and, in accomplishing the deicide, make haste to consummate your own reprobation and destruction !

Let us also accompany our Divine Redeemer going to Calvary to finish the work of salvation ; but let us accompany Him with a spirit of religion, revering all His steps, and with a spirit of docility, profiting by the instructions which He continues to give us. Nations of the earth, come at the bidding of the prophet : “ Come to the mountain of the Lord.” Come with Him to learn His ways and to know how to walk in His footsteps.\* Consider your Saviour approaching the place of execution and meeting the fate which ends His life. But in what state, O Heaven ! do we see Him ? Surrounded by soldiers, officers of the law, pontiffs, priests—all

\* Isaiah ii. 3.

His enemies, feasting their eyes upon His humiliations and their hearts on the hope of His approaching death. Surrounded by the entire people whose rulers have instigated them to join in their hatred and to mingle reproaches, raileries, and blasphemies with their own. In the midst of this violent, this furious crowd He proceeds, still wearing His crown of thorns, bruised with many blows, torn with stripes, crushed under His sufferings, weakened by the loss of blood, and bearing a heavy cross. Under its shocking weight He must climb the hill of Calvary. Behold the true Isaac in whom all generations shall be blessed, bearing the wood of the holocaust. A figure of the Messiah, Isaac of old, by command of his father Abraham, had carried to the mountain the instrument of his death ; and it is also by command of His Heavenly Father that the Isaac of the New Law, Jesus Christ, is similarly burdened. But what a difference between the two ! Isaac of old did not know the fate that awaited him, and asked his father where was the victim. But Jesus Christ follows the road marked out for Him, fully cognizant of His destiny. God, satisfied with the obedience of Abraham, did not require him to consummate his sacrifice ; our Saviour is

certain that nothing less will be received from Him.

The physical strength of our Lord, now greatly diminished by all that He had suffered, is not equal to the cruel and enormous load put upon Him, and He falls beneath the cross. His executioners begin to fear lest He may not be able to come to the fatal spot whither they conduct Him. They begin to devise means to give Him assistance, not through pity for His state, but because of their excessive hatred. His death on the way to Calvary would not have satisfied them ; they desired Him to die more ignominiously. It happened at that moment that they met on the road a Jew of Cyrene named Simon, who was coming from his house in the country. They seized him and forced him to help Jesus carry His cross.\* We have just said "it happened," as if it were by chance. Let us correct ourselves: there is no *chance*. It is only a word invented by our ignorance to express causes of which the knowledge is hidden from us. Nothing happens in the world that is not ordained by Providence. Especially is this so in the Passion of our Lord, in which the smallest circumstances had been foretold, prearranged,

\* Mark xv. 21.

and decreed in the depths of His divine wisdom. This it was that brought about the meeting with Simon the Cyrenean at the precise moment in which our Lord, falling from fatigue and exhaustion, could no longer bear His cross. He was thus conducted to the place of meeting, first to give the required assistance, and secondly to give us a profound instruction. It is commonly believed that the Cyrenean, after our Lord's resurrection, became one of His followers ; but it is certainly evident that in this circumstance he is a figure of all good Christians. In him we see literally realized the precept of Jesus to bear our cross after him. Let us contemplate our Blessed Master, when Simon comes to His assistance, regaining His standing posture, turning towards us and addressing us again in the words He had expressed in the course of His mission : " If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."\* And again : " He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me."†

We must bear our cross ; it is a necessity, as well as an obligation. We have no choice in the matter. Children of Adam, our inheritance

\* Matt. xvi. 24

† Ib. x. 38.



is suffering ; heirs of his crime, we are also heirs of his penalty. We enter into the world as into a prison in which death awaits us. If, before placing each man on earth, Providence had shown him, as in the case of St. Paul, all that he would have to suffer in the course of his life, how many would have accepted the gift of a sorrowful and painful life ? But He has done more for us : death, the chastisement of sin, Christ has made the expiation of sin. Oh ! the admirable and profound views of eternal wisdom ! Oh ! the incomparable benefit of infinite mercy ! To suffer has become a blessing ! “For our present tribulation, which is momentary and light, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.” \* “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” † “Rejoice and be glad when men shall persecute and calumniate you, for your reward in Heaven shall be great.” ‡ These maxims are not far-fetched ; they are the words of eternal truth. But in making suffering an honor Christ our Lord makes it a duty also. There is no way to Heaven but the way of Calvary. “Turn where you will,” says the author of the “Following of Christ,” “and you will not find

\* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

† Matt. v. 5.

‡ Ib. 12.

a higher way above nor a safer way below than the way of the holy Cross." Seek out the footsteps of the saints, and you will not fail to find them on this painful road. If it were decreed that Jesus Christ Himself, all holy and impeccable as He was, should suffer thus to enter into His glory, how can we, sinners that we are, who have so much to atone for, expect to escape afflictions? And if there were some other way of salvation, can we suppose that our Divine Master, full of goodness, and doing so much for us, would not point it out to us? We cannot, then, dispense ourselves from the cross. But this is not sufficient; merely to bear it is not the entire title to sanctity. For do we not sometimes see not only the just but sinners bearing their crosses, often heavier than those of the former, often brought upon them by their own sins? But these crosses are frequently useless and barren of any good results. Tribulations ill-received are graces abused, warnings of God despised, means of repentance rejected. "Thou hast struck them," says the prophet, "and they have not grieved; Thou hast bruised them, and they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than the rock, and they have refused to re-

turn.”\* The necessity, therefore, of bearing the cross is a powerful motive to bear it well. We are obliged to bear it, and we are able to make it meritorious or fruitless. What blindness would it not be in me, then, to make it, not the instrument of my salvation, but of my reprobation ! I cast my eyes upon the Cyrenean, and I contemplate him carrying the cross with Jesus Christ, and I see that it is the true means of rendering more easy and more useful the burden from which I cannot escape.

To bear the cross with Jesus Christ is to bear it with His spirit. He bore it because he willed it. In this His condition is different from ours ; for it is the great Power to which all things are subject that places it upon us. But the secret of Christian mortification is to make that which is necessary voluntary, and freely to conform ourselves to the irrevocable decree which ordains human affliction. In this we truly resemble our Divine Model, who conformed His will to that of His Father in accepting the most bitter sufferings. This is truly to bear the cross with Christ when we accept trials of all kinds with resignation ; bear them patiently ; and, instead of murmuring, rather bless the

\* Jeremiah v. 3.

hand that chastises and purifies us. If the Cyrenean had known that the cross he was forced to bear was the cross of his God, the instrument of his redemption, the pledge of man's salvation, would it have been necessary to have constrained him to carry it? Would he not have presented himself to the soldiers and importuned the favor of bearing it? Let us imagine ourselves in his place. God gives to us that which the Jews obliged him to take; and what he was ignorant of we truly know. We know that the cross presented to us on the part of God was first carried by Himself. We are well instructed in all the benefits to be derived from bearing this cross; and yet, like Simon, it is necessary to use violence to make us carry it. Forced to accept it, we often strive to throw it off; and, unable to deliver ourselves from it, we are too apt to bear it with a bad grace, with ill-humor, disgust, murmurs, and almost in revolt. To carry the cross with Christ is to carry the cross which He sends us; it is His because it comes from Him, and it is also ours because it is the one with which we are charged. God does not give us a choice as to what cross we may be willing to bear; He reserves this to Himself. The crosses pre-

pared for us by Providence are the only ones we should particularly desire ; they are the only ones we are bound to bear. The cross of our Lord laid on the shoulders of Simon was not an indefinite cross or the one of which he had made choice. What soul is there, though possessing the weakest faith, that would not be ambitious for his place? Who would not be jealous of the honor conferred on him? Would we not have contended, had we lived at that time, for this precious burden? But how could we have borne that heavy cross, if we do not now cheerfully bear the light ones that are placed upon us? There is nothing more common, even among those who have an elevated idea of their own piety, than to hear: "I can bear such and such a trial; but this one is quite insupportable. I can easily bear that affliction, for I am accustomed to it; but I cannot bear this."

Thus do we prescribe limits for God in His chastising Providence, seemingly ignorant that the most meritorious and the most agreeable in our eyes should be the special crosses He has prepared. Let us not pretend to know better than He what is fittest for our individual nature, proportioned to our strength, or calculated to advance our salvation.



And what has He not done to lighten our burden? What encouragements, what facilities has He not given us to carry it? He has gone before us. He does not say, Go before Me; but He says, Come after Me. As in the case of the Cyrenean, He makes us bear the cross after Him. He does not command us to do anything which He has not first practised Himself. But what do I say? He is far from prescribing for us all that He Himself endured; our cross is but a very small part of His. Let us compare our light sufferings with His terrible tortures; if we prefer it, let us compare them with the guilt of our sins. Shall we, then, dare complain that our afflictions are too bitter or too great? But not only has He borne the cross which is presented to us; He also helps us carry it, as He helped Simon on the way to Calvary. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that "they went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus," \* because in the light of faith they saw Christ in the midst of them helping them bear their cross. The martyrs, who were imbued with the same spirit, disconcerted their tormentors by their constancy. In prison and in exile holy

\* Acts v. 41.

confessors have braved and defied the tyrant's arm. Solitaries in the deserts have delivered themselves up to austerities the bare recital of which frightens and confounds us. Christian virgins, rising above the weakness of their sex, have astonished strong men by their courage in the face of death. Yes, saints of all times and of all classes have received, loved, sought, and desired tribulations—some asking God either to let them suffer or die; others desiring not to die, provided they could suffer to the purpose. So we, having before our eyes the grand example of the Chief of all the elect bearing with His omnipotent hand a heavy cross, ought to be desirous of bearing ours with Him. Let us grieve for having carelessly borne our crosses in the past, and let us resolve that in the future we shall courageously ascend the holy mountain, there to find the term of our labors, the place of our repose, the sojourn of our eternal felicity.

In going up to Calvary our Lord noticed in the crowd that followed Him a number of holy women who had served Him in His evangelical career. He saw them weeping and disconsolate because of the deplorable state to which He was reduced and the frightful fate that awaited Him

on the mountain. You, O most tender of mothers, must have been, and really were, among them! Your love has brought you into the sad footprints of your Son. You are come to take part in His sorrows and to transfer a part of yours to Him. You are come to have the prophecy, long since delivered, fulfilled in you: "Your own soul a sword shall pierce." \* An ordinary mother, listening to the cry of nature, would have fled from this spectacle. In Mary all is supernatural, and her courage is stronger than her grief. Our Lord turns to the women weeping for Him; but is it to console them? No. Even in this state of fearful abasement He preserves His character of Master and Teacher. He instructs them even then, and through them He instructs the whole world. Let us meditate upon the heavenly lesson He gives them. It has three characteristics: a precept, a prophecy, and a maxim—a precept by which to rule our lives; a prophecy to confirm our faith; a maxim to excite us to virtue. He commences by telling those daughters of Jerusalem "not to weep for Him, but for themselves and for their children." † Who, then, is this Man, so superior to all humanity? Who is this Man that,

\* Luke ii. 35.

† Ib xxiii. 28.

in the lamentable state to which He is reduced, going to certain death, indeed already nearly dead from fatigue and brutality, forgets Himself, and, occupied only with others, forbids His friends to weep over Him and wishes them to weep only for themselves and their children? Could we have imagined, if He Himself had not expressly told us, that any one seeing His sufferings could help but weep, or weep for any but Him? Is there anything more deplorable than the death of the Man-God? Yes, without doubt; it is the cause of that death. Tears of compassion flowing from mere natural emotion He rejects; fruitless tears, producing no conversion, He condemns. He wishes us to reserve our tears for that evil which affects us more essentially and touches Him more sensibly than His Passion. He wishes us not to weep for Him, but for that which made Him weep; to weep for our sins, which, after having caused His Passion, renew it every day. In considering the grief and pain of our Lord let us view them principally in relation to our sins; let us contemplate the immensity of God's goodness, who suffered so cruelly to expiate the offences offered to Himself, and the immensity of the malice of these offences that required the sufferings of our

God. Let us, therefore, change our tears of tender love into tears of sincere grief. These are the tears most agreeable to Him—the tears He required of the holy women. The prophecy contained in the words to these daughters of Jerusalem had already been often announced. It was the coming destruction of Jerusalem, a consequence and a punishment of the deicide. Frightful days He predicts for that doomed city when He said: “The days shall come wherein they will say: Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that have not borne, and the paps that have not given suck. Then they shall begin to say to the mountains, Fall upon us; and to the hills, Cover us.”\* Like Samson of old, He will involve in His destruction those enemies who, having thrown Him into prison and wounded Him unto death, still mock Him and insult Him. But, far from taking pleasure in this, it is still a subject of affliction to Him. Jerusalem condemns Him, and He weeps; Jerusalem outrages Him, and He has pity upon her; Jerusalem hurries Him to a gibbet, and He calls her to repentance. Whence could He have derived a knowledge of the ruin of the guilty city excepting from His divine omniscience? The Jews were tran-

\* Luke xxiii. 29, 30.



quail; the Romans satisfied. Who could then look for the revolt of the former or the vengeance of the latter? The prophecy realized is the seal of His divinity. He alone can predict future events in such a manner who is master of them.

Moreover, our Lord, under the form of a metaphor, delivers to us an awful and terrible truth: "For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?" \* The green wood is the fertile tree covered with leaves, beautiful in its flowers and abounding in fruit. Christ presents Himself to us under this emblem. The dry wood is the dead tree, useless, incapable of producing, and only awaiting the moment when it shall be cast into the fire. Sinners, do you not recognize yourselves in this image? You see the torments your sins have brought upon your Saviour; it is only a feeble imitation of them He requires you to endure. If the mere appearance of sin was treated in Him with such awful rigor, what may you expect for the reality of your wickedness? When I consider the innocence of Jesus Christ and the multitude of my own sins, how can I avoid trembling at the thought of what I have brought

\* Luke xxiii. 31.

on myself? This salutary reflection should be engraven on my mind; it should follow me everywhere; it should recur to me on all occasions and in every temptation to sin. Surely, in view of the terrible consequences of our sins, we must be wicked indeed to persevere in them.

Finally, our Lord is come to the summit of Mount Calvary. In like manner God once conducted Moses, a figure of the Messiah, to the summit of Mount Nebo, from which he beheld the land to which He had conducted His own chosen people; and there the holy patriarch expired.\* So did Almighty God conduct His only-begotten Son to the top of Calvary, from which He showed Him the Church that was there to have its origin, paradise that was there to be opened, and the place where He was to be immolated to appease divine justice. We remember that when our Lord commenced His career the demon brought Him to a very high mountain, and there displayed before Him the kingdoms of the earth with their glory, and promised Him all these if, falling down, He would adore him.† What He then indignantly rejected He now receives from the hands of His Father. He goes to Calvary to be put in pos-

\* Deut. xxxiv.

† Matt. iv. 8, 9.

session of all the earth, of all its kingdoms, of all its peoples, now become His inheritance. From the crest of that mountain, therefore, I call all nations; I invite them to be spectators of the grand sacrifice of which they are the object. The altar is erected; the Victim is ready. Let the whole world, which has heard Him more than three years, come and contemplate the last scene.

### XIII.

*THE CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH OF JESUS—HIS  
LAST WORDS ON THE CROSS.*





### XIII.

#### THE CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH OF JESUS—HIS LAST WORDS ON THE CROSS.

“They crucified Him ; and with Him two others, one on each side, and Jesus in the midst.” (John xix. 18.)

INSTRUCTED from our childhood to revere the sacred wood which has been the instrument of our salvation, we contemplate the cross with a feeling of holy reverence. Wherever we see it, on our altars, in our churches, on the wayside, in sacred places or in any place, we cling to it with a love almost reaching the point of adoration.

To judge of the ignominy of the penalty of the cross, let us cast our thoughts upon the age in which our Lord was crucified. This form of punishment was then considered the most disgraceful, and no Roman citizen could be legally condemned to it. It was because of this very dishonor that the Jews took special pains to have our Blessed Saviour sentenced to crucifixion. “Let us condemn Him,” they said, “to a most shameful death.”\* In this,

\* Wisdom ii. 20.

although they knew it not, they were ministers of Providence and instruments in the fulfilment of a prophecy. In the designs of divine wisdom our Blessed Redeemer should be treated in the vilest manner, so that His glory might be more fully manifested to the whole human race. The ignominy inflicted upon His sacred person proves to all men of every age the difficulty of establishing His religion, and stamps upon His work the marks of His divine power. To aggravate still more the opprobrium of our Lord He was executed between two thieves; and in this another prophecy is fulfilled, for it was written that "He should be accounted with the wicked." \* And still another prophecy is fulfilled in the following circumstance. The soldiers stationed at the cross divided His clothing among them. But when they came to His tunic, which was a seamless garment and entirely of the same texture, instead of tearing it they cast lots for it. They were driven to this course by an all-ruling Providence which had inspired holy David one thousand years before to foretell this fact: "They parted My garments among them; and upon My vesture they cast lots." † "And the soldiers indeed

\* Isaiah liii. 12.

† Ps. xxi. 19.

did these things.” \* By this admirable accord between the most minute circumstances related in the ancient prophecies and their exact fulfilment, there are ample grounds for our faith and hope.

Behold the Victim now extended upon the altar on which He is to consummate His sacrifice—the Victim of divine justice, which puts upon Him all the sins of the world ; the Victim of infinite mercy by which their guilt is remitted : a double mystery, of terror and of consolation, upon which we cannot too frequently meditate in order to fill our hearts with fear and with confidence. Behold the Mediator placed between Heaven and earth : Jesus Christ, our Lord, casting His blessed eyes from the height of the cross upon all that surrounds Him ! He sees all generations and all ages for which He is offered. And what is it that first attracts His attention in a special manner ? Is it the Apostles, always so dear to Him ? Is it the holy women who follow Him to the last ? Is it His own most tender Mother, who wept at His feet ? None of these. It was His executioners that formed the first object of His regard. All else He forgets, to occupy Himself with them.

\* John xix. 23, 24.

But is it to call down vengeance upon them? Oh! listen, revengeful men: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." \* What a sight Calvary presents to us! At the foot of the cross an infuriated rabble gloats over the sufferings and humiliations of Jesus; they come to continue their insults even in the pitiable state to which He is reduced. On that cross He not only pardons them and forgets their affronts, but loves them, asks for their forgiveness, and endeavors to excuse them. He thinks not of what they cause Him to suffer, but that it is for them He suffers. With loud cries they demanded His death; He only asks that His death may be their life. They say: "Let His blood be upon us and upon our children"; He prays that His blood be not laid to their charge. They fill up the full measure of their crimes by their injuries even to His last breath; He tries to palliate this excess of cruelty by pleading their ignorance. Ignorance it is, truly, but voluntary and criminal. Wilful blindness it is rather than ignorance. For if their ignorance had been complete and excusable, what would He not have done for them? In another point of view the prayer of

\* Luke xxiii. 34.

our Lord is more comprehensive. It embraces all who had any part, directly or indirectly, in His death. It includes all of us, unhappy sinners, who were the first authors of that death. Let us apply the merits of His death to ourselves, and cry out from the depths of our hearts: "Pardon, pardon, O my Saviour! for all the sins that have nailed Thee to this bitter cross. We do not deserve it; but let us ask it through Thy merits, who, from the bed of the cross, dost so heartily pray for it. We acknowledge before Thee that we knew not what we did in our sin; that we were blind, senseless, mad. O Jesus! let the cause of our crime be its excuse; deign to present to Thy Father in His eternal sanctuary the prayer for sinners which Thou offeredst to Him on the cross."

But to obtain the effect of this wonderful prayer it is not sufficient merely to repeat it. In conferring upon us so great a benefit our Divine Master gives us an example which we must follow if we would secure the favor. He had constantly taught it during life; and in death He seals it with His blood. It is contained in these undying words: "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and



pray for them that persecute and calumniate you.”\* He had announced the precept; He shows us how to observe it. He had forbidden revenge; now He deprives our self-love of all pretexts to seek it. Let those who nourish hatred in their hearts come and pray before the cross of Jesus Christ, and listen to Him praying for His murderers; let them then show the reasons of their anger. Is it the gravity of their injuries? Do they approach in any degree those of Jesus Christ? Is it their high rank? Will they attempt to compare it with that of the Sovereign of the universe? Is it the law of justice requiring the chastisement of offenders? Does not the deicide require it more imperiously? A precept so precise and so much out of the common course of the world required the most striking example to give it effect. It was necessary to destroy in the heart of man a passion so strongly rooted as that of revenge, and to substitute for that passion a virtue so heroic as the love of our enemies. Yet what effect has it produced in the majority of men? Every day we ask in the Lord’s Prayer that God may forgive us our offences as we forgive the offences com-

\* Matt. v. 44.

mitted against us. But do we really wish that God would give this measure of mercy to our enemies? If we do not wish it sincerely our prayer only means that we wish God not to forgive us; so that, in place of seeking His indulgence towards us, we only provoke His wrath.

This excess of goodness on the part of our Lord, far from softening His ferocious enemies, only irritates them all the more. Their rage seems to increase in proportion to His patience. They redouble their imprecations and their blasphemies. Shaking their heads in derision, they say: "Vah! Thou who destroyest the temple of God, and in three days buildest it up again, save Thy own self."\* Ah! yes. He will rebuild that temple, but it will be in the hour fixed in His eternal wisdom. He will not anticipate the time prescribed in His heavenly oracles. All will be accomplished at the moment already foretold. The chief priests, doctors, and princes of the people take part with the vulgar throng. In their cowardly meanness they mingle their railleries with those around them, allude to His miracles, and remark that He performs none at this moment: "He saved

\* Matt. xxvii. 39, 40.

others ; Himself He cannot save.”\* O inconsistent men ! If you acknowledge that He did work miracles, how, then, can you say that He could not work them now ? If He had the power to save others, does it argue the want of that power when He does not wish to take Himself out of your hands ? “ Let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.”† Come down from the cross ! Ah ! no ; He will take care not to do so ; He adheres to it like the vine to the wood ; He will not be detached from it till the fruit shall have come to maturity. Come down from the cross ! This would be to counteract the purpose for which He had ascended it. This miracle would have nullified all the other miracles which His death alone could consummate. Come down from the cross ! This would have been to disobey the divine decree which condemned Him to remain upon it till that decree would be annulled. Judea had witnessed many of His miracles, sufficient to convince all that He was the Son of God. On Calvary it was obedience to the will of God that proved the same truth. Those who used the language first quoted could not have been in good faith. Did they believe in Him when they

\* Matt. xxvii. 42.

† Ib.

saw Lazarus raised from the dead, even after having been four days in the grave? Not being able to deny it, a party among them even sought the life of Lazarus.\* Alas! when I see the cruel instrument of crucifixion and the salvation of mankind attached to it, and when I reflect on the fewness of those who draw any fruit from it, I am almost at a loss to know what I ought to desire. Here I see the blood of Christ shed and Heaven opened, and I cry out: O my Saviour! cling to Thy cross; accomplish the sacrifice which for me Thou hast commenced. Then again I see the most of men profaning, yes, trampling under foot, this blood that was shed for them, and I am tempted to say with the Jews, but in a different spirit: O Lord! come down from Thy cross, now useless for many on whose account Thou wast laid upon it. To save them Thou dost remain upon it, but I fear it will only damn them.

Not only the people, the soldiers, the pontiffs, the scribes, and the guards blaspheme our Lord, but also one of the thieves hanging by His side. "If Thou be Christ," he said, "save Thyself and us."† Behold here our dear Lord insulted by a vile wretch whose crimes brought him to

\* John xii. 10, 11.

† Luke xxiii. 39.

this end ! In the midst of all these maledictions, injuries, and blasphemies is there no voice raised in behalf of our Blessed Saviour ? Is there no one to bless or comfort or justify Him ? Thanks to God ! In that confused tumult, amid the cries of rage and vengeance, I hear, at last, a voice that takes His part. It is the other thief, who answers his companion in guilt : “ Neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation ? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds ; but this Man hath done no evil.” And turning to Jesus, he said : “ Lord ! remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said to him : Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise.”\* They asked a miracle. Behold a miracle of grace ! In the state of abasement to which they have reduced Him He converts a sinner. Whilst the men who had witnessed His miracles cast into His face cries of fury and insult, this man, who had seen His greatness only in His patience, confesses, adores, and invokes Him as his God. An Apostle has despaired and is lost ; a thief believes, hopes, and is saved ! Sinners, whose consciousness of evil drives you almost to despair and impeni-

\* Luke xxiii. 40, 41, 42, 43.



tence, behold the great mercy of your Lord and His constant readiness to save you ! With what sins soever you see yourselves covered, if you sincerely turn to Him He always has an attentive ear in your favor ; His arms are extended to embrace you, and paradise is open to receive you. But remember that the conversion of this particular sinner at the moment of death is the only one we read of in the sacred volume. God rewarded the humble confidence of this poor sinner, but it does not prove that He does not punish the rash presumption which continues in sin and counts on a death-bed repentance. The repentance of the good thief is a model of what ours should be. How much we have to admire in it ! First, the *faith* which penetrates the thick veil of humiliation and sorrows, and under that veil recognizes its God. This is an image of what ours ought to be, whatever obscurities may hide God from us in impenetrable mysteries or in the Blessed Sacrament of His love. Secondly, his *humility*, which sorrowfully confessed that he suffered with justice ; so ought we to confess the chastisements inflicted on us by the divine power as essentially just. Thirdly, the *hope* which inspired him with the happy thought of being able to obtain pardon ; this

same hope ought to bring us to the sacred tribunal of reconciliation. Fourthly, his *zeal* for the conversion of his companion shows us how much we ought to labor for the conversion of our companions, especially those whom we may have drawn into sin. Fifthly, the *ardor of his prayer*, which issued from his sincere love of Him to whom he offered it. Thus also should we pray to merit the immense benefit of our release from sin. When our sorrow combines all these characteristics of true sorrow we may well expect to hear the blessed word addressed to us: "This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise." We must also admire the authority of our Lord preserved even in His last moments. With what dignity this King so profoundly degraded promises a kingdom! What grandeur of character He displays amid His greatest sorrows! He dies proclaiming some His chosen ones and others cast away; delivering Judas to eternal ruin and assuring the penitent thief of paradise. On the last day His cross will be the great tribunal whence, with the same power, He will deliver His everlasting decrees.

On the cross another consoling spectacle touches His heart. Many holy women had faithfully served Him during the time of His

public ministry, and in disgrace and death they would not abandon Him. Among them was the constant object of His tender regard, His own dear, Blessed Mother, who was brought to this awful spectacle by a supernatural effort of courage and love. Though penetrated with bitter grief, she is not crushed by it. The sight of her Son dying and desolate pierces her heart; her faith in that Son, redeeming the human race, animates her with strength and courage. And while all nature is in commotion at the death of Christ His Mother is unmoved.\* Alone, among all the children of Adam, in possession of the great secret; alone in the knowledge of the grand mystery which He accomplishes, the Blessed Mother takes her part in it. The holy Fathers represent her in this sublime action as a figure of the church. She came to offer Him to His Heavenly Father on the altar of the cross, as the Church on her altars offers Him through all succeeding ages. To this offering of infinite price she adds another and a most precious one—namely, herself. In like manner the Church offers herself with Jesus Christ in the august Sacrament of the Eucharist. Mary, at the foot of the cross, unites her sentiments with

\* John xix. 25.

those of her Son; submits, like Him, to the eternal decrees; and, in partaking of His sorrows, partakes also of the resignation which made Him accept them, and in the infinite charity for men which made Him desire them. Let us unite ourselves in these generous sentiments; let us bear them with us to the Holy Sacrifice to which we are admitted; let us represent to ourselves Mary at the sacrifice of her Son, and let us beg the grace to imitate her. Near His Mother Jesus saw the Apostle whom He loved in a special manner; who had been one of His most intimate confidants; and who leaned on His breast at the Last Supper. In the garden of Gethsemani John had fled with the rest; but his deep love soon brought him back again to the footsteps of his Master, and even to the cross to receive His last sigh. At the sight of two so dear to Him, our Lord, expiring though He is, seems animated with new strength and increased tenderness, of which He gives them a parting sign, and makes His last will and testament in their favor. But what will He give them? In life He had no place to lay His head; in death His garments have been divided among His executioners; His blood has been shed even to the last drop. Yet His

ingenious love finds a means of bequeathing to them a most precious legacy. He gives each of them to the other. First addressing His holy Mother, He says to her: "Woman, behold thy son; after that He saith to the disciple: Behold thy Mother." \* And from that day St. John took her as his Mother. To St. Peter, because of his ardent zeal, Christ had committed His church; to St. John, because of his intense love, He committed His holy Mother. But this sublime gift, as the holy Fathers tell us, has even a still more extended significance. St. John is here a figure of all the faithful whom Jesus cherished with the most tender love. To us, in the person of St. John, does He give His Mother; by Him we are made CHILDREN OF MARY. He tells *her* to adopt us as her children; and He tells *us* to acknowledge her as our Mother. Praise to God! She accepted the charge and has since continually exercised its functions. From the pinnacle of glory to which her Son has raised her she constantly pleads with Him in favor of the other children committed by Him to her care. Christ is our advocate before His Father; she is our advocate before Christ. What other

\* John xix. 23, 27.



benefits, say the holy Fathers, could have been accorded to us? The charity of Mary towards us, her power with her Divine Son, are surely not lessened by her coronation in Heaven. She is ever the Mother of grace to the just; the Mother of mercy to sinners, if they wish to be converted. But to receive the fruits of this adoption we must deserve them. St. John, whose place we hold, leads the way. From the moment that he became a child of Mary he performed with the strictest fidelity all the duties of sonship. He brought her to his house, cared for her, cherished her, served her until the hour when Christ took her to Himself. Let us, like him, be true children of Mary; respectful, confident, docile; let us honor her by our aspirations, invoke her in our prayers, imitate her in our virtues. In a word, let us be worthy children of Mary, and we shall always find in her the best, the most tender, the most beneficent Mother.

A cry of distress does escape our Lord on the cross. Is it because of His awful sufferings? He had desired them. Is it because of His humiliations? To repair the vice of human pride He had accepted them. No! All that He suffered from the hands of men affected

Him not at all. It is the abandonment of His Father that He laments; it is the want of all interior consolation that afflicts Him. Behold His cruel torment! The martyrs in their pains were sustained by the unction of heavenly grace; but the Chief of the martyrs receives no comfort. God refuses to His own Son what He freely gave to all others who suffered for His sake. Let us not wonder at this abandonment on the part of God the Father. His Son is there burdened with all the sins of the human race. In this light His Father considers Him; and this is why He leaves Him without support or consolation. "My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?"\* These are the very words which holy David had uttered in His Person when he describes the Passion.† Hence interpreters have considered this psalm as an exposition, by anticipation and in the spirit of prophecy, of all that our Lord was to endure on the cross. We may derive from this a salutary instruction. It often happens, even to the just, that they feel themselves deprived of the interior sentiments of divine grace; that they experience, instead of sweetness and unction, only dryness and coldness.

\* Mark xv. 34.

† Ps. xxi.

Let them not be surprised or lose courage; the Son of God was treated in the same manner. Let them learn from His example the conduct they ought to pursue in such circumstances. To God they should have recourse. Tender and humble prayer is not forbidden; but, like the prayer of Jesus Christ, it should be full of resignation to the divine will, which in afflicting them proves their fidelity.

Prepared to finish His sacrifice, and knowing that all the circumstances detailed in the prophecies were fulfilled, He said: "I thirst." \* A vessel full of vinegar was near Him. The soldiers, having taken a sponge and dipped it in the vinegar and then in hyssop, offered it to Him. And thus was fulfilled an oracle of the prophet: "In My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink." † Besides the fulfilment of the prophecy, the thirst of our Lord presents to us another subject of meditation. Doubtless He was grievously troubled by a physical thirst after all the shocking trials through which He had passed. But His most ardent thirst, that which consumed Him, was the thirst for our conversion, sanctification, and salvation. By this He teaches us how earnestly we ought to desire and work for our salvation.

\* John xix. 28.

† Ps. lxviii. 22.

The most important event ever witnessed in the world is about to be accomplished. The great work of the regeneration of the human race, expected during so many ages, is almost terminated. The mortal life of our Redeemer and our redemption are come to a final point. For three hours the sun himself announces this fact to the earth in withdrawing his light and delivering it to darkness. Through this darkness our Lord turns His eyes to Heaven and then to the earth. He sees in both the work required of Him entirely finished; and He cries out: "It is consummated." \* In Heaven the will of His Eternal Father is executed; His justice satisfied; His anger appeased. The handwriting of death against this sinful world is blotted out. "Mercy and truth have met each other. Justice and peace have kissed." † It is consummated! On earth the oracles are accomplished; the figures realized; the desires of the patriarchs fulfilled; the chalice drained; His blood shed even to the last drop; the synagogue abolished; the Church founded. It is consummated! "Father," He said, "into Thy hands I commend My spirit." ‡ And, crying with a loud voice, He expired. Such a cry

\* John xix. 30.

† Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

‡ Luke xxiii. 46.

from a dying Man was supernatural. It showed that He died, not from exhaustion, but by His own will. That cry pierced the heavens and opened them; it reached the depths of hell and shattered the powers of darkness; it spread itself over all the earth, and taught mankind that their Redeemer, forsaking time, had hastened into His eternity.



#### XIV.

*WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE DEATH OF JESUS.*



## XIV.

### WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE DEATH OF JESUS.

“And Joseph, taking Him down, wrapped Him in fine linen, and laid Him in a sepulchre that was hewed in stone, wherein never yet any man had been laid.” (Luke xxiii. 53.)

THE wonderful life predicted by so many prophets, prefigured by so many just men, desired by so many generations, ended on a cross. Thus closed a career rich in miracles; abounding in benefits; replete with works of holiness and of mortification; continually devoted to the instruction and salvation of the human race; consumed by fatigues, labors, and pains. And it is closed in death amid the most disgraceful of penalties, the most ignominious humiliations, the most cruel sufferings! O blessed spirit who descended with a song of gladness to announce His birth to the world! why do you not come to-day to mourn His death? Heavenly voices so distinctly heard on the summit of Thabor and on the banks of the Jordan proclaiming Him the well-beloved Son of God, the object of His eternal pleasure, why are you not heard on Calvary in strains of grief and la-

mentation? Mortal men for whom He lived, for whom He died, why are you not crushed by the weight of your grief? But wherefore ask for the tears of Heaven and earth? Is it not from this very cross of Calvary that all His greatness takes its rise? He foretold it; He has realized it: that when He should be raised from the earth He would draw all things to Himself. Against all the efforts of hell and all its powers, and from the same bitter tree, He draws to Himself all nations and all ages. The rulers of the earth see their power perish with them, and their glory goes down with them into the grave; but the moment Christ our Lord expires upon the cross His reign begins. From His cross He subjects the world to His sway; from His cross He causes the nations to recognize Him as their Master, to obey Him as their Monarch, to love Him as their Saviour, to adore Him as their God. From His cross He opens a new order of things which will change the face of the earth; new eras will begin, new empires will be formed, a new religion will be established. The cross of Jesus Christ is the landmark between the old world and the new. It is the object of the desires of the former, the object of veneration for the latter.

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Let it also be the true object of our veneration. Let us frequently prostrate ourselves at the foot of this cross ; it was the instrument of our redemption when it bore the body of our Lord ; let it now be the means of our sanctification. In it we shall find all graces ; they all flow from this blessed wood. Before it the lives of saints have been formed and brought to perfection and final consummation. If we accustom ourselves to constant prayer before this sacred image of a crucified God, contemplating it with tender piety, offering before it our fervent vows, we shall receive it with joy inexpressible when at the last moment of our lives it will be presented to us. Then our hearts will cling to it ; then our hands will enfold it with tenderness ; and our dying lips will press it with heavenly delight. And with what gladness shall we not see it reappear when the whole world will be no more, and when Jesus Christ will come, armed with this sacred sign, to pronounce upon all mankind the irrevocable decree of mercy or justice ? But if we shall have had the misfortune to have neglected this salutary devotion ; if business, dissipation, the pleasures of life shall have made us strangers to the cross of our God, what ideas will fill our minds when, at the moment of dis-



solution, it will be brought to our sight? With what terror shall we not see it in the final destruction of the world, when the very sight of it will reproach us with having abused its graces and rendered its merits vain?

At the moment of our Lord's death His soul, leaving its companion all bloody and deformed on the cross, and delivered at last from its burden of pain, flies to open the prison in which the souls of the just, who had awaited His coming, had been detained. It is not given us in the designs of Providence to know in what particular place this prison was; nor are we acquainted with the nature or extent of the felicity accorded to its inmates whilst awaiting the day of their delivery. Faith clearly teaches that paradise was closed by the sin of our first father, and could not be opened except by the reparation of the true Father of all the faithful. We may well judge what was the anxiety of these holy souls to see the day of their delivery! In their life-time all their aspirations tended to the coming of the Messiah. What, then, must have been the ardor of their desires for Him in the prison to which they had been consigned! Jesus Christ, triumphing over death and the powers of hell, filled their languishing souls with His

presence ; and, at His glorious ascension, opened Heaven for their eternal joy. It was a numerous cortége and a brilliant one ; in the words of St. Paul, it was leading captivity captive. They were the ornaments of His triumph ; He presented them to His Father as the trophies of His conquest, and as the spoils wrested from the infernal enemy.

All nature seemed to sympathize in the death of its Author and gave distinct signs of desolation. During the three hours of His hanging on the cross the sun was darkened, as if he refused to shed his light upon the greatest crime ever committed. At the instant of our Lord's death the earth trembled ; the rocks were rent ; and the tombs opening gave up their dead, who, coming into Jerusalem, were seen by many. The veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom.\* This torn veil of the temple presents to the minds of the holy Fathers many mysteries. At one time it seems to them to announce the fact that the temple, from this moment rejected by Almighty God, will never again be honored as the special place of His abode ; that it will be destroyed, and will give place, according to the prophecy

\* Matt. xxvii. 51, 52, 53.

of Malachy, to other temples in every nation and in every place, where sacrifice shall never cease to be offered to the Most High, and the clean oblation shall greet Him to the end of time. The veil thus rent and exposing to common view the inner sanctuary also signifies that the veil which covered the tablets of the law is for ever lifted, the shadows are dispelled, the figures realized, and all that they had covered made manifest. This is the word of St. Paul: "All these things happened to them in figure; and they are written for our correction, upon whom the ends of the world have come."\* This word explains the whole ancient covenant, in showing the relations it bore to Jesus Christ, and especially to Him crucified. His cross is the common centre to which the old law is directed, and in which the new law is rooted.

But let us not fail to see other prodigies of a different order, yet not less admirable. Behold the conversions made by Christ in His death. The centurion and the soldiers who kept guard round the cross—that is, the very men, probably, who had so cruelly scourged Him, so rudely crowned Him with thorns, so frightfully outraged Him in the court of Pilate; who had di-

\* 1 Cor. x. 11.

vided His garments amongst them, and who had insulted Him even on the cross—these, when they felt the earthquake and all things that happened, were filled with fear, and cried out: “Indeed this was the Son of God.”\* Even among the Jews themselves, who had with such persistent malice demanded the death of Christ, many, touched with the spectacle of which they were witnesses, returned in sorrow, striking their breasts. Thus not only does all nature show itself sensible of the death of Christ, but even His persecutors and executioners are stricken with sorrow and remorse. And shall we, for whom this awful scene has been enacted, the objects of this immense love of God towards us, remain harder than the rocks, more obdurate than the pagans and Jews? At the foot of the cross these conversions were effected; and Jesus Christ is as powerful and as merciful now as He was then. Let us do our part; let us in sorrow strike our breasts, and the same sorrow will obtain the same pardon.

The infidels of our time, greater enemies of Christ than those of His own day, blush not to call in question the wonders of His death. These striking miracles, say they, could not have

\* Matt. xxvii. 54.

failed to convert the Pharisees, the scribes, and the priests. We may answer them by asking: What interest could the Apostles have had in inventing these facts? For them there was nothing to be gained by it except the disgrace attached to lying and the penalties due to imposture. But supposing, against all evidence, that they had the will to deceive the world, where was the possibility of doing it? When they boldly and openly published these prodigies, it was immediately after they had taken place. When St. Matthew wrote them in his Gospel, it was then, at most, only eight years after they had happened. It was even in the city of Jerusalem, where there were innumerable witnesses of the death of Jesus Christ. Could he possibly have been deprived not only of all virtue but also of all common sense in daring report facts visible to all eyes, if those to whom they are related had not seen them? And if he had had this inconceivable effrontery, would he not have been at once contradicted by every one of those whom he puts down as having taken part in the transaction? Would not his Gospel have been immediately decried and universally condemned as a fabrication? Would he not have found himself the only



Christian living if one fact he relates had been proven false? His narrative, made at such a time and in such a place, is an evident and a bold challenge to contradiction. Contradiction could not be successfully resorted to either at that time or in the age immediately following. Men like Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian, who faithfully copied what the first enemies of Christianity had advanced against it, never raised a doubt as to the reality of its miracles. Infidels of our time, therefore, how do you know that they have not taken place? Upon what foundation do you place the assertion, when before your time no person dared advance it? To maintain your position to-day you have to combat not only the testimony of the Apostles, but also that of your original leaders.

But these miracles, you say, did not convert the priests and scribes. Have those who propose this objection never reflected upon the effects of prejudice, envy, and envenomed hatred? Jesus Christ traversed Judea three years, preaching and working miracles everywhere; but the aversion and fury of His enemies, the chief men of the nation, continually increased against Him. When they saw miracles that

could not possibly be denied they asserted that it was by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of devils, that he had cast out devils. They made no secret of the fears they entertained lest the entire nation would follow Him on account of His doctrine and wonderful works; and that it was necessary to destroy Him to prevent that result.\* When they could not deny that Lazarus had been raised from the dead they resolved to assassinate him, but failed.† Is it surprising that the men who had resisted these prodigies with such fury would easily yield to the truth which was confirmed by them? In refusing to believe in them they are unreasonable but consistent. The same impulse moves them; the same passions sway them; the same principles direct them. And do we not find in the unbelievers of our times an answer to their own sophisms? The manifest, incontestable, ever-abiding miracle of the conversion of the world by the power of the cross is before them and cannot determine their faith. How can it astonish them, therefore, that the wonders performed under the cross did not convert the unbelievers of that time?

But the hour approaches which is the be-

\* John xi. 47, etc.

† Ib. xii. 10, 11.

ginning of the Sabbath day of the Passover. It is the most solemn of all the Jewish festivals. No bodies of the dead were allowed to remain on a cross that day. Hence the Jews went to Pilate, requesting him to hasten the death of the culprits by breaking their limbs in order to take them away. The soldiers sent by the governor did effectually break the limbs of the two thieves crucified alongside of Christ; but coming to Him, they found Him already dead, and broke not His bones. But one of the soldiers with a lance opened His side, and water and blood issued forth.\* In the pierced side of Jesus the holy Fathers see a figure of the formation of the Church, His spouse; in the same manner as the spouse of the first man was formed from Adam's side. In the blood and water they discern the sources of the sacraments. But, without entering into the mystical interpretations, we may give two reasons for this fact: the first is taken from the Evangelist who relates it and bears witness to it. He tells us that it was to fulfil the prophecy. It had been decreed in the law that no bone of the paschal lamb, a figure of the Messiah, should be broken; and of the Messiah Himself

\* John xix. 31, etc.

it had been foretold that "they would look upon Him whom they had pierced." \* Thus the fierce soldier who, even after the death of Christ, exercises his fury upon Him is only the executor of His designs. He neglects to do what he had been commanded to do ; and he does what he had no orders to do. In all this he acts by a divine impulse and against his own intention. He performs what had been decreed in the counsels of God ; he omits what the supreme will had forbidden. In like manner we, feeble mortals, often believe that we are following our own views, when in reality we are only obeying those of Providence. Another reason for the actions of the soldiers is to be found in the designs of Heaven to leave no doubt as to the death of Christ. They are the witnesses of His death ; and it is because they find Him dead that they do not break His bones, and their testimony will not be doubted. The soldier who pierced His side would certainly have caused His death, if it had not already taken place. The water and blood which flowed from the wound could only have come from the covering of the heart of our Lord, which being pierced, He could no longer be a living Man.

\* John xix. 31, etc.

Evening having come, a Jew of Arimathea named Joseph, a man of noble rank and an officer, who had been a disciple of Christ, but secretly through fear of his countrymen, now courageously presented himself before Pilate and asked him for the body of Jesus. Pilate wondered that He was already dead; and, finding from the centurion on guard that it was true, gave the body to Joseph.\*

The sacred text presents to us in Joseph of Arimathea the example of many who may even yet be found in the world; of those, namely, who are at heart Christians, but who are afraid to appear so. They are convinced of the divine truths, but dare not say so openly. They see the full beauty, justice, and utility of Christian morality, but they are ashamed to practise it. Base human respect prevents them from showing themselves in their true colors, and often makes them assume a character that does not belong to them. It turns them away from the good which they approve and cherish, and attaches them to the evil which they detest and despise. This sentiment is injurious to God and ignominious to man. Injurious to God, for the good-will of libertines is preferred to His

\* Mark xv. 42-45.



esteem, His praise, and His eternal recompense ; His terrible judgments are less feared than the censures and raileries of men. Ignominious to man, for what fear is more debasing than that which cringes before opinions which one despises, which is false to one's self and contradicts one's own principles in words and actions? Will any one venture to affirm that it is an honor to be bound and tied by associations which he despises in his heart? In the good old times of our forefathers it was only impiety that dared not parade itself. When it existed at all it was timid and shamefaced, avoiding the public gaze. In those days virtue, faith, and piety, sure of being respected, showed themselves with confidence. Oh! shame of our generation! Can it be that courage is now required only when a man has to show himself a Christian? Unbelief is let run at large; faith is held down as a captive; the impious man glories in his blasphemies; and the man of faith is silent.

But see with what firmness, with what a glorious spirit, Joseph overcomes the feeling of cowardice that had so long held him down! Whilst the Apostles of the Saviour, trembling lest they should be subjected to the same hard

fate that had befallen their Divine Master, ran to shut themselves in an upper room, he courageously comes to Pilate and asks the body of Jesus, to render to it the last honors. Thus to brave the hatred and fury of all the great men of his nation there was need of unflinching intrepidity. And in what moment does this heroic courage show itself? It is at the moment when Jesus dies, and when, to all human appearance, there is nothing but danger in being His disciple or in professing to be one. But at the foot of the cross his faith is reanimated; the supernatural courage which he there witnessed has given back to him all his own. From that moment he feels the merits of the blood which flowed before his eyes. Let us come, in these blessed days of the Passion of our Lord, to contemplate His death; let us come from it, like this holy man, with tender piety that will render to Christ, now dead for us, all the duties of love and gratitude. Let us come from it with a vigorous courage which will enable us to confess our faith openly, to brave the censures of impious men, and to oppose to the scandals of the world a conduct openly religious.

Another disciple of Jesus joined himself to

Joseph of Arimathea. It was Nicodemus, who, in the beginning of our Lord's preaching, had come to Him at night to converse with Him in private. It was the same man who afterwards in the council, desiring to defend Jesus, drew upon himself the reproaches of the Pharisees.\* "And Nicodemus also came, he who at first came to Jesus by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. They took, therefore, the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the custom of the Jews to bury. And there was in the place where He was crucified a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein no man had yet been laid. There, therefore, by reason of the Parasceve of the Jews, they laid Jesus, because the sepulchre was near at hand."† In the burial of Christ the interpreters see a figure of the august Sacrament of the Eucharist, which, after having been offered up on the altar, is entombed in the worthy soul. The care and pains taken by the two disciples in His burial signify the dispositions with which we ought to receive Him; the spices in which they embalm Him signify the good odor of virtue which is the result of every worthy communion. The white linen

\* John vii. 50, etc.

† John xix. 39-42.

in which He was enveloped signifies purity of soul in the recipient ; the new tomb in which He was placed signifies a conscience in which there is no mark of the deadly touch of sin. The large stone at the mouth of the sepulchre signifies the good resolutions which prevent all entrance to the heart of anything that would offend Him.

“The next day (being the Sabbath) the chief priests and Pharisees came together to Pilate, saying : Sir, we have remembered that that seducer said while He was yet alive : After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, the sepulchre to be guarded until the third day, lest His disciples come and steal Him away, and say to the people : He is risen from the dead ; so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said to them : You have a guard ; go guard it as you know ; and they departing made the sepulchre sure with guards, sealing the stone.”\* How profound are the views and how infinitely wise the dispositions of Providence !

In the first place, it was infinitely important that the death of Jesus Christ should be established beyond doubt, so that His resurrection might also be certain. Some of our modern un-

\* Matt. xxvii. 62, etc.

believers, after eighteen hundred years, attempt to throw doubts on the death of Christ; they tell us, in fact, that if Christ rose from the tomb in three days it was because He had been buried alive. Foreseeing this vain device, the eternal wisdom confounded it in the most striking manner. It was on this account, as we have seen, that the side of our Lord was pierced with a spear so that the heart itself was struck. It was for the same reason that His body was wrapped in linen and pressed with the weight of the aromatic spices, which would have suffocated Him had He been alive. But what reason have these deists been able to adduce to prove the assertion so rashly made? What witnesses can they bring forward on their side? Is it Pilate? But he gave the order for the burial of the dead body of our Lord. Is it the centurion placed over the guard at His cross? But he also reports the death of Christ. Will they bring up the Roman soldiers? But these, having found Christ already dead, abstained from executing their orders as to the breaking of His limbs. Is it the chief men of the Jews? But they are so fully persuaded of the fact of His death that they have fixed a seal upon His tomb and a guard around it. Is it the disciples of our



Lord? But how can we suppose them to bury Him, if they had not seen Him dead? Great and small, Jews and Romans, friends and enemies, one and all give the same testimony. They unanimously agree that He died upon the cross. Seventeen centuries elapsed before any doubt was raised on this essential point. Is it not, then, the most positive effrontery to contradict a fact so decidedly established, so generally attested, and so universally believed?

In the second place, God, in His divine omniscience, had foreseen that the Jews would accuse the Apostles of our Lord of having taken away His body in the night. He makes them answer themselves in advance. There were among them many who had foreseen the possibility of the body being stolen, and who consequently took all precautions necessary to prevent it. The soldiers required as a guard for the sepulchre are named, not by Pilate, but by the Jews themselves; and who will doubt that they selected the most vigilant, the most incorruptible, and the most zealous against our Lord? When they desired to invent the fable of the body having been stolen, their own action furnished the strongest evidence against them. Thus did Providence provide, by the hands of

those most anxious to deny it, the most incontestable proof of the resurrection.

Let us prepare ourselves for the celebration of this great festival by a firm and lively faith; let us rise with Jesus Christ from the death of sin to the life of grace which He has purchased for us. Let us commence with Him a new life—a life like His own. “Christ rising from the dead dieth now no more; death shall no more have dominion over Him. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies.” \*


\* Rom. vi.











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